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THE BLESSED GOD

IMPASSIBILITY

BY

REV. MARSHALL RANGLES, D.D.

TUTOR IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, DIDSBURY COLLEGE

AUTHOR OF

"FOR EVER" "SUBSTITUTION" "FIRST PRINCIPLES OF FAITH"

"DESIGN AND USE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE" (FERNLEY LECTURE)

ETC. ETC.

London:

CHARLES H. KELLY

2, CASTLE ST., CITY RD.; AND 26, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1900

TO THE
PAST AND PRESENT
STUDENTS
OF MY THEOLOGICAL CLASSES
WITH MUCH ESTEEM AND LOVE

PREFACE

IF it should be objected that the position maintained in this monograph is old-fashioned and out of harmony with some strenuous teaching of the age, the writer will take it for undesigned commendation. The treatise aims at counter-acting doctrine, which, he thinks, has no countenance in the faith of former ages, and still less in either natural, or supernatural revelation. Novelty is no criterion of truth. The writer is ever ready to welcome what is new, if proved true; and equally averse to relinquishing the old merely because it is old; which is only another way of saying he has an eager desire for truth whenever or wherever found, especially when it concerns man's personal relations with God. Far be it from him to imagine that those whose teaching is opposed in the following

pages, are a whit less in love with truth than himself. Nevertheless, he may be excused for holding the opinion that for the acceptance of their views, they perhaps owe more to certain so-called "humanitarian" tendencies in the atmosphere of modern thought, than to sound argument.

When ideas are broached which not only run counter to those which have long prevailed in the Christian Church, but would change our faith on the relations subsisting between God and man ; it is a call, at least to pause and re-examine, before adopting a change of so much gravity. To be wrong in our doctrine of God, is to misconceive His religion.

Believing the advocacy of the doctrine of God's passibility by Christian men is a new departure in a wrong direction, and fraught with peril to practical Christianity, all the more so because of the ability and sincerity of its advocates, the present writer feels constrained to raise the signal of danger. Of course, he may be in error ; of that the readers will judge for themselves. At any rate, he has honestly sought to ascertain the doctrine of God, and now offers the

result to the public, well aware how imperfect is the presentation. Gladly would he have seen the task undertaken by abler hands. The silence of others left him no alternative to making an attempt at contributing, however inadequately, to the apparent requirements of Christian Theism.

MARSHALL RANGLES.

DIDSBURY COLLEGE,
January 1900.

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THE BLESSED GOD



I

THE QUESTION

WHETHER God, in His own nature, is or can be the subject of pain, sorrow, trouble, or any form of suffering, from any cause whatever, is the question here proposed for discussion. It is not whether He sees, pities, or relieves it; but whether it can have a seat in His experience. Not whether it was endured in the finite nature of the incarnate Son, and, because of the unity of His two natures in one person, could be properly predicated of His one undivided, divine-human person, somewhat as material and immaterial qualities may be predicated of the same man consisting of body and soul, *e.g.* he is tall and he thinks; the question is, whether the divine nature, *as such*, can be the subject of suffering.

There is a sense in which the most thorough adherents of God's impassibility may affirm that God suffered and died, the Lord of Glory was crucified, purchased the Church with His own blood, was born of a woman, endured the ignominy and anguish of the cross; that is, in His finite, passible nature; inasmuch as being God and man in *one person*, whatever belonged properly to either nature is predicable of, and belongs to, the whole person, though as subject He may be called by a divine name, meaning that He who suffered in His lower nature was truly God, *e.g.* He "though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 8). In the same way divine acts and attributes may be predicated of the one divine-human person, though as subject He be called by one of His human names, *e.g.* "the Son of Man" is at once on earth and in heaven; the Word who "was God" was "made flesh," and dwelt visibly among men; "the Son of God with power" was raised from the dead (Rom. i. 4). Thus to speak is not to predicate suffering of the divine nature, as such, but to affirm that He who was God suffered in His passible nature. Our question is whether the divine nature, considered apart from the human, was capable of enduring suffering.

It is asserted that God undergoes painful passion at sight of the sins miseries and follies of disobedient creatures, and in sympathy with the sufferings of those He loves; and accordingly that the divine nature of Christ, as such, endured the agony of His humiliation which fell on His mortal flesh; and in His present exaltation endures in His own experience the sorrow and anguish of His followers on earth. Some who hold this view advance with logical consistency to the corollary that the suffering of God makes Him a fit object of our pity; and that as He suffers in Himself all the depth and breadth of human pain, He is the greatest sufferer in existence. Our contention is that, while abounding in mercy, as divine He is impassible.

II

DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

THROUGH the course of past centuries the leaders of Christian thought have generally denied the passibility of God as pernicious heresy. But in recent years, several eminent writers in magazines, booklets, and sections of larger works, have insisted that the glorified Redeemer and the infinite God are literally subject to great mental pain in view of the sufferings of mankind. I am not aware of any exhaustive treatise on the subject by such writers. Sometimes the style of advocacy is that of vehement or sentimental rhetoric, in a strain which implies emotional or ethical defect in theologians who retain the older and hitherto prevailing belief. Some of these writers assume that their doctrine of a suffering God does more honour to Him and affords more benefit to man than the opposite teaching.

No doubt they regard the advancement of

their tenet as an irreversible stage in the development of theology. But if it be unsound, as I am fully persuaded it is, it will probably turn out to be one of those temporary reactions which come and go—passing moods, or sports of opinion, which emerge into public notice, and more or less of popular favour, as if they had come to stay, but ere long lose all place among living ideas.*

* The insight and opportuneness of the following passages from the *Spectator* of April 8, 1899, may well justify their reproduction :—“There is much in current thought which is probably quite transitory. Hasty developments to suit the fashion of the moment, in metaphysics, or in ethics, lead to no definite line of progress, no *growth* in Christian doctrine such as will secure a recognisable identity between the Christianity of the first century and the Christianity of the twentieth. . . . The principal cause of this defect appears to us to be an indiscriminate idealisation of the *Zeitgeist* of the present hour,” *e.g.* worship of Hegelianism to-day and of Aristotelianism in mediæval times. “Again, the ethical sentiment of the hour may pronounce *ex cathedra* against such doctrines as the atonement or original sin as intrinsically unjust; but such pronouncements, again, have no assured mark of a true development. They may well be due to a temporary phase of an *emotional* development, which can claim the sanction of no law of growing advance, no relation with the gradual approach of the human mind towards further truth, or they may be due to a false estimate of what is really involved in the doctrines condemned. . . . Similarly, the *Zeitgeist* would make short work of the miraculous, would sweep away our Lord’s divinity, would bring the Bible to a level with other works, by no means in deference to assured advance in science and criticism, but in

If it be claimed that the recent departure of some theologians from the doctrine of God's impassibility is an advance from error to truth, the obvious answer is that whether it be that or a lapse from truth to error is just the question in dispute. Posteriority is no sure mark of improvement.

In these pages quotations from old authors may seem rather extensive. The object is not to conclude the question on the *ipse dixit* of any uninspired man, but to remind the reader of the many eminent theologians of all schools who have held firmly to the impassibility, which raises a presumption that their position was based on careful and skilful investigation; and also to let them, in some degree, adduce their own reasons for the faith that was in them. That the doctrine here combated is an innovation on the accepted doctrine of the Christian Church, hardly admits of dispute. It is tacitly admitted in such expressions as the following:—"The

virtue of just those temporary exaggerations and emotions against which the fixed truths of revelation were intended to be an impressive and standing antidote." In the line of these weighty remarks, it might be reasonably contended that the assertion of God's passibility now current is, to a considerable extent, due to a certain kind of humanitarianism in the *Zeitgeist* which is intent on fashioning God more and more after the model of a man.

suffering God. This is not simply the teaching of modern divines, it is a New Testament thought.* That it is in the New Testament is an unproved assertion; and one is fain to think the divines who teach it are very "modern" and very few, though it must be admitted that priority and prevalence of belief alone can no more settle the question than posteriority.

A church, having adopted a theological standard, may easily decide for itself whether a given doctrine is admissible, by comparing it with its established rule. But assuredly the present is an age in which a disputed tenet, in order to hold its place in the faith of Christian adherents generally, must be prepared to pass again through the crucible of keen controversy, and to make good its claim on grounds of rational evidence. At the same time, to find a tenet embodied in the Confessions of the great historic Churches may greatly assist our researches, by furnishing precise discrimination and definition, and by pointing us to the consentaneous judgment of acute and honest thinkers who would be unlikely to formulate a doctrine, and place it among foundation truths, without believing they had sufficient reason for so doing.

* "But is God Silent?" R. Heath, *Contemporary Review*, September 1899.

If much less has been written on the attribute of impassibility than on some others, the reason may be that, since patristic times, it has been taken for granted in the theology of the great ecclesiastical denominations. Its incorporation in the most widely accepted symbols of Christian faith is significant of its hold on the mind of the church in general, and implies that it must have been scrutinised by many profound thinkers in different times and countries, and from many different standpoints.

In view of the fact that in the judgment of the English reformers it was deemed worthy to stand in the first article of religion, it ought not to be renounced by a member of the Anglican Church without careful examination. Art. I. runs, "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or *passions*; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible." This article has been expounded and defended by Bishops Burnet, Pearson, Tomline, and Browne, as well as by many other divines; and virtually adopted by the Evangelical Free Churches of this nation. Similar words are embodied in the Westminster symbol, which has long been the recognised standard of English-speaking Calvinian Churches in this country and

America ; and to a large extent in the Protestant Churches of the Continent of Europe.* John Wesley affirmed the doctrines of the Methodists to be in substantial agreement with the standards of the Anglican Church. Until very cogent evidence is adduced, it would seem unreasonable to cast away a doctrine which has been rooted so deeply and so long in the faiths of Christendom.

The leading theologians of the past leave us in no doubt of their firm adherence to the doctrine. Tertullian, of the second century, says the cry, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "was uttered so as to prove the impassibility of God."† Hippolytus says, "There is one God . . . unoriginated, impassible, immortal."‡ Origen, of the third century, says, "We maintain that God is altogether impassible."§ Augustine's teaching was, "In God there can be no suffering." He is "impassible, yet not impatient." "Be it far from us to surmise that the impassible nature

* Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith declares :—
 "I. There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute." "II. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself ; and is alone in, and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them."

† Vol. ii. 404. ‡ *Ad Noctus*, vol. ii. 60. § Vol. ii. 96.

of God is liable to any molestation. But like as He is jealous without any darkening of spirit, wroth without any perturbation, pitiful without any pain, repenteth Him without any wrongness in Him to be set right; so is He patient without ought of passion." * The fathers were obliged to study the question deeply in wrestling with the heresies of their times. John Calvin wrote, "God we know is subject to no passions." † "God is exempt from every passion." ‡ "God of His own nature," wrote Bullinger the reformer, "doth not repent as men do, so that He should be touched with grief." † James Arminius declared, "God is without any passion, as He is single and immutable." §

Coming to British divines, the words of Bishop Butler are, "God almighty is, to be sure, unmoved by compassion or appetite, unchanged by affection: but then, it is to be added, that He neither sees nor hears, nor perceives things by any senses like ours; but in a manner infinitely more perfect. Now, as it is an absurdity almost too gross to be mentioned, for a man to get rid of his senses, because the Supreme Being discerns things more perfectly without them; it is as

* *Faith and Works*, "Patience," p. 544.

† On Hos. xi. 9.

‡ Fourth Decade.

§ *Works*, ii. 350, Nichol's edition.

real, though not so obviously an absurdity, to endeavour to eradicate the passions He has given us, because He is without them." And as man is not without passions because God is, so God has not passions because man has. If it be proper for God to be pitied, He must be pleased with men when they pity Him. But, says Butler, "Thus when mention is made of delight in being pitied, this always conveys to our mind the notion of what is really a weakness; the manner of speaking, I say, implies a certain weakness and feebleness of mind, which is, and ought to be, disapproved." "Is not passion and affection a weakness, and what a perfect being must be entirely free from? Perhaps so, but it is mankind I am speaking of; imperfect creatures, and who naturally, and from the condition we are placed in, necessarily depend upon each other." * This master mind was in no danger of attributing the inferiority of the creature to the Creator.

Bishop Pearson is not less explicit. "That eternal Word which before all worlds was impassible." The Messiah, "not in His deity, which is impassible."† Bishop Tomline wrote, "To suppose that God is circumscribed by body,

* *Sermons*, pp. 98, 99, 101, Gladstone's edition.

† *Creed*, Art. iv.

consists of material parts, or is liable to passions, would be so utterly inconsistent with our ideas of infinite perfection, with our notion of a Being who is equally present everywhere, and who is free from every possible defect, that we must, without hesitation, pronounce that God is without body, parts, or passions." *

Stephen Charnock, with whom the attributes of God were a special study, maintained that Christ's "compassions are not lessened by an assumption of our humanity, but an experimental compassion gained in His human nature, which the divine was not capable of because of the perfection of impassibility." †

John Howe thus states his view: "He hath not left the matter liable to be so misunderstood, as if He were really affected with solicitude or any perturbation concerning us (which He hath sufficiently given us to understand His blessed nature cannot admit of)." His "serene complacency and displacency" "are unaccompanied with the least commotion, and import nothing of imperfection," *e.g.* "as angry and grieved." The account of God's anger and grief "cannot be any passion as the same names are wont to signify with us." ‡

* *Elements*, ii. 65, 66.

† *Works*, ii. 1122.

‡ *Prescience*, p. 122; *Redeemer's Tears*, p. 446-455.

Dr. George Hill, a Principal of St. Andrews, and in former times an authority in Scotch theology, lays it down, "If you (Arians and Socinians) say that God suffered, you do indeed affix an infinite value to the sufferings (of Christ), but you affirm that the Godhead is capable of suffering, which is both impious and absurd." The divine nature, he affirms, is "impassible." "We admit that the Godhead cannot suffer." *

John Wesley's language is unequivocal. "This God is a Spirit, not having such a body, such parts, or such passions as men have." "He is infinitely distant from every touch of evil." "There is not anything of what we properly call passion in God. But there is something of an infinitely higher kind: some motions of His will which are more strong and vigorous than can be conceived by men; and although they have not the nature of human passions, yet will answer the ends of them. By grief, therefore, we are to understand a disposition of God's will, flowing at once from His boundless love to the persons of men, and His infinite abhorrence of their sins." †

Richard Watson quotes with approval Archbishop Tillotson, "God is said to be grieved and afflicted for the miseries of men. But though

* *Lectures in Divinity*, p. 274.

† *Works*, vii. 266-486.

God be pleased in this manner to convey an idea of His mercy and tenderness to us, yet we must take heed how we clothe the divine nature with the infirmities of human passions: we must not measure the perfections of God by the expressions of His condescension; and because He stoops to our weakness, level Him to our infirmities. When, therefore, God is said to pity us, or to be grieved at our afflictions, we must be careful to remove the imperfection of the passion, the commotion and disturbance that it occasions.' " *

Dr. Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* (selected and arranged by Rev. Samuel Dunn), taught, "Ascribe no human passion; for this would desecrate, not sanctify Him." "Separate Him from all that is imperfect, human, evil, capricious, changeable, and unkind. . . . The system of humanising God, and making Him, by our unjust conceptions of Him, to act as ourselves would in certain circumstances, has been the bane both of religion and piety." "The upholder of all things is infinitely happy, because infinitely perfect." † On Hebrews ii. 10, Clarke says Christ took part of flesh and blood, "thereby becoming capable of those sufferings to which,

* Watson's *Institutes*, ii. 155, 156.

† Pp. 79, 80, 66; *Sermons*, i. 4-12.

without such a union with flesh, the divine Sanctifier could not have been obnoxious." Again, "We can conceive of no perfection that He does not possess in an absolute and unlimited manner." "All things are contained and move in or by Him; but without any mutual passion: He *suffers* nothing from the motions of bodies."* "The mutual inbeing of the Father and the Son cannot but imply an infinite mutual complacency . . . this wonderful summary of all beatitude even as it is in God Himself," "who is infinitely blessed because He is infinite love."† Dr. W. B. Pope writes, "We cannot fathom the mystery that the impassible God should mourn and rejoice and be angry." "Much of the Biblical language is anthropopathic, an accommodation to human infirmity." His perfection "excludes the possibility of defect." "We ascribe to Him the most absolute freedom from all that can impair well-being, and the infinity of that which by its communication makes the creature blessed."‡

These quotations sufficiently indicate how thoroughly the doctrine of God's impassibility has always been in the very grain of Christian theology.

* Italics Clarke's.

† G. Steward, *Mediatorial Sovereignty*, ii. 470, 471.

‡ *Compendium*, i. 302, 307, 328, 329.

III

AN ANCIENT HERESY

THE passibility of God was an element of the ancient heresies which Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, and other Christian leaders combated, and the Church resisted and condemned. "Generally those who denied the distinctions of persons in the Trinity were called *πατριπασσιανόι* in the West, and *σαβελλιανόι* in the East." * Some of them do not appear to have preferred Patripassianism (suffering of the Father) *per se*; but accepted it as the logical consequence of their Christology, which resolved Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into one person.† Some of the modern believers in the passibility of God are not driven to it by their Christology, but adopt it in spite of their Trinitarian faith.

Monophysitism reduced the person of Christ to one nature. Eutyches, the Monophysite

* Hagenbach, *Hist. Doc.* i. 352-396, 397.

† See Dorner, *System Christian Doc.* i. 367.

leader, was condemned at a Council of Constantinople, A.D. 448; and at Chalcedon, A.D. 451. Athanasius and others held that the suffering of the divine nature was a logical result of Arianism, which was condemned at the Council of Nicæa, A.D. 325. The same result was the inevitable consequence of Apollinarianism, and of most of the heresies which denied the true and complete humanity of Christ, in its two distinct natures, united with His equally true and proper divinity, whether the consequence was admitted or not.*

In opposition to the Christology which involved Patripassianism, the Council of Chalcedon declared, "We teach that Jesus Christ is perfect as respects Godhood, and perfect as respects manhood; that He is truly God, and truly a man consisting of a rational soul and a body; that He is consubstantial with the Father as to His divinity, and consubstantial with us as to His humanity, and like us in all respects, sin excepted. He was begotten of the Father before all creation as to His Deity; but in these last days He was born of Mary the mother of God as to His humanity. He is One Christ existing in two natures, without mixture, without change, without division, without separation, the diversity

* Dorner, *Sys. Doc.* iii. 310.

of the two natures not being at all destroyed by their union in the person, but the peculiar properties of each nature being preserved, and concurring to one person, and one subsistence." While this symbol kept the passible and the impassible natures distinct, by asserting the unity of the person, it afforded some reason for predicating suffering and crucifixion of God, seeing He who was truly God suffered and died. In that sense Leo the Great said, "There is one thing passible, and another impassible, yet His is the contumely whose is the glory. He is in infirmity who is in power; the self-same person is both capable and conqueror of death." * The exaggeration of this view was the Theopaschitism (God suffering) which was favoured by John II., Bishop of Rome, and gained some vogue, but not universal acceptance, in the Orthodox Church. Its affirmation of the crucifixion of God did not necessarily mean that the pain was endured in the divine nature; but that the theanthropic person was at the same time impassible Deity and crucified humanity; somewhat as we now sing, "Love made my God a man of grief," or "The immortal dies." †

* Quoted by Shedd, *Hist. Doc.* i. 402.

† To the same effect runs the Westminster Confession. In the Son of God "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the

The Audians, after Audius of Mesopotamia, in the fourth century, carried literal interpretation to the utmost extreme, not only ascribing to God mental pain, but bodily form and parts, hands, eyes, ears, feet, wings, postures, and all the human properties in which Scripture represents Him.* The sect disappeared in the sixth century.† To be consistent, those who contend that God suffers because the Bible attributes grief and vexation to Him, might, on the same principle, maintain that He has "body" and "parts," and literally sits, stands, walks, and laughs. The considerations which induce them to stop short of this extreme literalism might well induce them to stop short of ascribing to the absolute and infinite the limitations, infirmities, and unhappiness of fallen men.

Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion" (ch. viii.). "Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature" (Art. vii.).

* Hefele, *Hist. Councils*, sec. 39, p. 334.

† The Mormon sect, founded by Joseph Smith, and settled in Salt Lake, are said to hold in a coarse way ideas of God as a Being of bodily form and parts. See Blunt's *Dictionary*.

IV

DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

IN endeavouring to show the passibility of God inconsistent with His attributes, our discussion need not be encumbered with references to any of the agnostic theories which have their roots in Kant's philosophy. There are, of course, unfathomable depths of the Godhead, compared with which all we know is superficial; and doubtless, on this question of God's feeling, the terms He applies to Himself have more behind them than we apprehend. But the measure of knowledge granted to us in His self-revelation, is real; and so far God is what He declares Himself to be. Our examination were profitless if we admitted the Ritschlian principle that the perfections truly ascribed to God cannot be more than "worth" or "value-judgments"; that is, ideas profitable for us to entertain, but having no corresponding reality in Him—a useful kind of subjectivism—ideas of value for us to think and

act upon, though destitute of any objective counterpart. Our discussion assumes that so far as our ideas of the divine attributes are correct, they correspond to what He really is in Himself. Accordingly, His love and hatred, joy and grief, complacency and displacency, represent not only valuable ideas for the guidance of our conduct, but positive qualities inherent in Him.

In the language of Richard Hooker, "the perfection which God is giveth perfection to that He doeth." And because what He does must correspond to what He is, all theological and ethical questions, thoroughly pursued, lead up to the consideration of His attributes. His action is determined by His character. The unsoundness of much which claims to be Christian doctrine would be apparent if tested by the necessary attributes of God. "Tell me," writes Dr. John Watson, "what is your conception of God, and I will work out your doctrine of man, of forgiveness, of life, of punishment. . . . Given your God, and your whole theology can be constructed within a measurable time." *

To object to study the attributes of God because it involves us in metaphysics, is a plea for ignorance of what it most concerns us to know. All the fundamental questions of Christianity

* *Mind of the Master*, p. 250.

are necessarily metaphysical, whether called so or not. When it is alleged that God is or can be the subject of suffering, and consequently an object of man's pity, it is incumbent on us to ask whether the assertion is not inconsistent with His known attributes, and therefore untrue.

1. *Perfection*.—Test the statement by His perfection.

(1) By this we understand His absolute, necessary, and infinite excellence, which admits of no weakness, defect, fault, or limitation in respect of any particular property or state of being. "He has from eternity to eternity all perfections, and infinitely more than it ever did or ever can enter into the heart of man to conceive." *

It is the presupposition of all other thoughts of His greatness. All our reasonings concerning Him take such perfection for granted. If we say He cannot lie or change or err or be cruel, or fail to be just, or be vanquished, or become subject to another, it is because He is presumed to be absolutely perfect. Unless we are prepared to surrender our Monotheism, we cannot but think of Him as absolutely free from every imperfection, and possessed essentially of all that is great or good or excellent; and we cannot but exclude

* Wesley, sermon on Mark xii. 32.

from our conception of Him whatever is contrary thereto. Any fault or lack would be fatal to His attribute of perfection. It might still be relative and limited perfection; it could not be absolute and infinite. Nor could He then be of His present worth to us.

“That God is perfect is one of the philosophers’ *κοίναι ἔννοιαι* (thoughts common to all) of those common impressions of light, or inbred principles of reason, wherewith nature (in their language) or God Himself (in the dialect of Christians) . . . enlighteneth every man that cometh . . . into the world.” *

To ascribe to God such relative perfection as may belong to a finite being is to undeify Him. Such perfection in the infinite One were an imperfection. If He be perfect as God, He must be infinitely perfect.

If it be objected that incapability of suffering would be a limitation of God, who, being infinite, cannot be limited; the answer is that it is no such limitation as implies imperfection or defect, just as it is no real limitation or loss of infinity that He cannot sin, is incapable of ignorance or impotence; or cannot do a thing which, expressed in words, is a self-contradiction, *e.g.* that He cannot do a thing and not do it in the same sense

* Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, p. 91.

at the same time. That which is proper to God may be improper to man, and even culpable, *e.g.* to proclaim His own glory, to demand and receive worship as Supreme. And what is proper and becoming in man may be improper to God, *e.g.* gratitude or subordination to other beings. Man may acquire knowledge—God cannot; for omniscience is essential and eternal to Him. Man may increase or diminish his power—God cannot; for He is always omnipotent. Man may be confined to a particular portion of space at a given moment—God cannot; for He is always everywhere. But that God cannot be or do all that a man may, is no proof of His inferiority, imperfection, or limitation. Similarly, that man can suffer while God cannot, is proof not of defect in God, but of perfection.

“Infinity is really nothing else but perfection . . . therefore can nothing which includeth anything of imperfection, in the very idea and essence of it, be ever truly and properly infinite. . . . A straight line is the rule and measure of a crooked, and not a crooked line of a straight; so that perfection is first conceivable, in order of nature, before imperfection. . . . We could not perceive imperfection in the most perfect of all those things, which we ever had sense or experience of in our lives, had we not a notion

or order of that which is absolutely perfect, which secretly comparing the same with, we perceive it to come short thereof. And we might add here, that it is not conceivable neither, how there should be any lesser perfection existent in any kind, were there not first something perfect in that kind, from whence it was derived.*

A being imperfect in one respect cannot be absolutely perfect in another. Limitation in one attribute precludes infinity in another. If God were imperfect in knowledge or wisdom, He would be so in power; for not to know how to use power is its limitation. Ignorance would narrow the scope of power. If He were not infinite in power, His independency and supremacy would not be infinite or absolute, but limited by some other power. If He were not perfectly immutable, His justice and love would be uncertain. If He were imperfect—that is, not infinite—in duration, that is, not eternal, He would be wanting in self-sufficient and necessary existence. Imperfection in His justice or benevolence would involve defect of holiness. Conversely, infinity or absolute perfection in some attributes necessitates the same in all. As Dorner says, “God unites all kinds of perfection in Himself.” “The

* Cudworth, *Intell. System*, iii. pp. 237–239.

divine nature cannot be abased by its own agency " is the doctrine of Lutheranism.* "We can conceive of nothing that can be added to His excellence to make it greater or more perfect than it is; and we can conceive of no perfection that He does not possess in an absolute and unlimited manner."† "Absolute perfection belongs exclusively to the Lord our God."‡ Our present argument is not addressed to any who deny the absolute perfection of God. With them we have no common ground on which to discuss the question before us.

This is the conception of God which pervades the Theism of Holy Scripture: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; that is, ye according to your finite nature, and He according to His infinite. "As for God, His way is perfect." "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God: the Rock, His work is perfect," which implies the perfection of Himself. "For thou Lord art most high above all the earth." In Him is "the fulness of the Godhead," "the effulgence of His glory," "His excellence is over Israel, and His strength is in the skies." "Thou art more glorious than the mountains of prey,"—all which

* *System Doc.* ii. 363 ; iii. 238.

† Dunn's *A. Clarke*, p. 68.

‡ Edmondson, *Elements of Revealed Religion*, p. 35.

ascriptions are incompatible with any the slightest lack or imperfection.

(2) Such perfection excludes all evil of every kind. Perfection and evil are direct contraries, and mutually exclusive. The perfect is all good. Evil, its opposite, is imperfection, and in any the least degree impossible in the perfect.

(3) But pain sorrow grief trouble death and all suffering are evil—not moral, but natural evil—the opposite of natural good or happiness peace enjoyment satisfaction or pleasure, as sin is the opposite of moral good or holiness. Whatever suffering may be in its associations, uses, or results, it is always *in se* an evil. In its subservience to desirable ends it may be relatively good, though not intrinsically. “What is good in itself is some felt bliss: what we call good things are means to this good.”* Suffering may be inflicted from a wise or benevolent motive, and may be subservient to good ends. It may be utilised as discipline, or may warn us off dangerous pleasures, or help in the diagnosis of disease, or develop heroic moral qualities in the sufferer, as in an epidemic or a war. “Shall we, then, because of these salutary effects, wish for the prevalence of cholera? or because wars bring out noble examples of heroism, shall we

* Lotze, *Microcosmus*, ii. 721.

desire to see wars prevail? The question has only to be asked to be answered, and it shows that this mode of justifying natural evil leaves much yet to be accounted for." * *In itself* suffering is an evil; not only a limitation of happiness, but a positive hurt. The pleasurable consciousness of its removal may be called good; but that assumes that the previous pain is not good, but evil. The pleasure is in the sense of release from evil. It may be of a kind or of such associations as necessarily presuppose pain; still the pleasure is not the pain, but its opposite; and that is only one kind of pleasure out of many.

To affirm that happiness could not be attained without suffering would only say that evil is necessary to good, which implies that the evil is still evil, whatever its use or result. Suffering is as plainly evil as happiness is good. If it be not evil, why do intelligent beings scheme and strive to avoid, remove, or mitigate it? If it be not a natural or non-moral evil, what is? † It is not necessary to be Epicurean or Hedonist to perceive that happiness is itself a supreme end.

* Orr, *Christian View*, p. 224.

† "Pleasure and pain are simple ideas. That which tends to produce the former is called NATURAL GOOD; and that which tends to produce the latter, NATURAL EVIL" (Doddridge, *Lectures*, p. 220).

None the less so because it must rest on the foundation of moral goodness. One may be happy in self-denial toil or pain for the benefit of others, or for the glory of God. Nevertheless the happiness is intrinsically good, as unhappiness is intrinsically evil. The pain may be made to serve a good purpose; yet in itself it is evil, and not desirable *per se*. Virtue is praised because it produces happiness, and men are warned against vice because it causes unhappiness, though not for that reason alone. True happiness is not a moral virtue, but a boon, and a perfection of its kind; as suffering is not a moral but a natural evil. By both human and divine government, the one is held out as a reward and incentive to right action; the other as the punishment of wrong-doing. When the mother suffers sleeplessness, hunger, and exhaustion for the sake of her child, the praiseworthy moral quality is not the suffering, but the love which made her willing to endure it. When a stranger risks his life in saving another from drowning, the moral virtue is not in the risk and struggle, but in the humaneness which prompted him to them. But we are apt to identify the suffering with its moral motive—the natural evil with the benevolence which makes the benefactor willing to suffer for the good of its object. But even

then we know the evil is suffered as evil, in order to prevent still greater evil, or to promote happiness as the desired end.

The subject of pain or suffering is an object of pity or commiseration to the benevolent, who desire, with more or less intensity, that he may be delivered from it. But why so, if his case be not an evil one? Except where it is the required punishment of wrong-doing, it is regretted as misfortune adversity or calamity, and as such it is deplored and avoided. "Pain is not merely a negation or want of pleasure, but a positive experience opposite in kind." "Pleasure and pain are respectively as the smooth play or the irksome fretting of machinery"; "the index of the natural and the unnatural in the use of powers." * Suffering is damage or injury to nature; disorder in conflict with order; of no value *per se*, and a detraction from the perfect state of its subject. It is a disturbance of the mental equilibrium which is necessary to the perfection of a sentient being. Pain is a kind of mastery over, or subjugation of the sufferer by antagonistic force; and thus implies his imperfection.

When it is said a righteous man is happy in a filthy dungeon, in painful affliction of body, or in any adversity, the antithesis between happi-

* Calderwood, quoted by Thompson, *Dict. Philos.*, p. 309.

ness and suffering is manifest. The happiness is not in the misery of the dungeon or the adversity, but in its contrasted accompaniment. The import of all such statements is, not that suffering is good or happy in itself, but that, in spite of the evil of suffering, the subject has some other element in the case which constitutes his happiness, and counteracts the evil. The counteractive is not the thing it counteracts. The suffering is still an evil, though not sufficient to prevent the exquisite enjoyment of something else conjoined with it. Thus we "glory in tribulation"; thus the apostles departed, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"; and thus Paul could write, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake," * rejoicing not because these sufferings were good, but because they were outweighed by or made the means of good.

All other things being equal, man is in a higher and better state without suffering than with it. So God in suffering would be inferior to God without it. To say He suffers voluntarily, or that His pain is "self-imposed," does not remove the inferiority; which is not in willing or not willing, but in the suffering. It

* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

is but to say He is voluntarily inferior. And how could the necessarily perfect Being voluntarily divest Himself of that perfect happiness which is necessary to His being, any more than of His being itself? To do either would be to undeify Himself, which His self-existence makes impossible. As Charnock says, "If any perfection of His nature could be separated from Him, He would cease to be God." *

We consider the fallen angels immeasurably below their original condition, and inferior to the unfallen, not only because they have lapsed into sin, but also because they have consequently lapsed into suffering. The entrance on a state of suffering by angels and men was recognised by the Creator as a *fall*, a degradation, of what was first made "very good," a great loss of natural good, as sin was a loss of moral good. A moral being who desired suffering in others for the sake of itself would be deemed morally bad; and if he so desired it for himself, he would be suspected of insanity.

Where we inflict pain as the means of avoiding some greater evil, or of promoting some state of happiness, we accept it as the less of two evils, or as a disadvantage leading to an advantage; but either case implies that, in itself, it is an

* *Works*, i. 209.

imperfection, accepted not for its own sake, but in view of a better object.

Notwithstanding the many ways in which God turns the curse into a blessing (Neh. xiii. 2), the Scriptures never fail to regard suffering and death as evil *in se*, *e.g.* "All the ways of the afflicted are evil" (Prov. xv. 15). "The evil days" (Eccles. xii. 1) are the days of decay feebleness trouble and dissolution. Possessions won by painful toil are soon lost. "This also is vanity and a great evil" (Eccles. ii. 21). The sorrow of bereavement which Judah feared for his father was "the evil" he dreaded (Gen. xliv. 34). To consume the chosen people was "the evil" of which God repented (Ex. xxxii. 14). The pestilence among the people was "the evil" which God made to cease (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). The sword judgment or pestilence was "the evil" which might come upon the nation (2 Chron. xx. 9). "There shall no evil touch thee" refers to the seven troubles which might come (Job v. 19). Job's friends had in view his disease pain shame bereavement and poverty, when they "comforted him concerning all the evil which the Lord had brought upon him" (Job xlii. 11). What but suffering is intended when God says, "I make peace, and I create evil"? (Isa. xlv. 7). "Shall evil befall a city

and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6) marks the suffering of citizens as evil. We are not just here concerned to vindicate the action of God in afflicting men, but only to show that He regarded the suffering as an evil and imperfection. Hence He laments its presence in His people, and seeks to remove it from them.

Granted that pain, though in itself a natural evil, is utilised by Providence for useful ends, as a means of discipline, and of warning us away from dangers to health and life, as a stimulant to adopt remedies and precautions, and as whetting our appetite for the enjoyment of health pleasure and other opposites of pain, it does not follow that it would have such uses in God or holy angels. Nay, there is every reason to think He cannot need it for any such purposes, seeing perfect power wisdom and holiness belong to Him.

If passibility be an attribute and perfection of God, it must belong either to the moral or non-moral class. But in systems of theology of various schools it is assigned no place in either. It is not in the same category as omnipotence omniscience immutability and eternity; nor in the same as holiness love and righteousness; for the obvious reason that as it is an imperfection

to rank it with divine perfections would be dishonouring and incongruous.

(4) But no evil—not even non-moral—can be in Him who is good in every conceivable respect, and to whom no imperfection is possible. “Evil is always contradiction to the divine.” “Evil antagonises the various definitions of God,” who “is the absolutely perfect, blessed, and glorious personality.”* In God evil would be disharmony, conflict, disturbance. Imperfection would reduce the infinite to the finite. Possibility is liability to limitation, and incompatible with the highest perfection.

For the same reason that God cannot die, He cannot suffer. He cannot die because He is self-existent and necessary; and He cannot suffer because, being self-existent and necessary, He is necessarily perfect. If it be correct to say with Richard Watson, we must “ascribe to Him every natural and moral excellence we can conceive; and when we have done that, we are to conclude that if any nameless and unconceived glory be necessary to complete a perfection which excludes all deficiencies, which is capable of no excess, which is unalterably full and complete, it exists in Him,”† we can, at the same time,

* Dorner, *System Doc.* ii. 359, 360.

† *Institutes*, ii. 171.

no more ascribe to Him the slightest touch of natural evil than we can ascribe to Him the least degree of moral delinquency.

Some of the ancient Patripassians seem to have tried to avoid making God really the subject of pain by saying, He did not suffer, but had fellow-suffering; had not passion, but compassion. They found it impossible, however, to keep clear of making God passible so long as they denied a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, or proper humanity in Christ. Their modern imitators generally have no such difficulty.

(5) Those who, from their belief in God's passibility, infer that He is a proper object of our pity, are logically more consistent than those who attempt to hold the one position without the other. But if the latter are convicted of logical inconsistency, at what a ruinous price do the former avoid it! The corollary revolts our thoughtful reverence, and inclines us to argue that the premises which involve a conclusion so intolerable must be untrue. Even Jesus in all His agony on earth, self-imposed out of pity to men, never craved their pity for Himself; so strong was He "as the Son of God with power," and as possessing the Spirit beyond all measure. How much less can the infinite Being desire or

tolerate the pity of His creatures towards Himself? The suggestion irrationally inverts His true relation to man; exalting the creature above the Creator.

Pity supposes something in its object the presence of which is matter of regret; there is an underlying wish that it were not present, because the object would be better without it; and the regret and deprecation are intense in proportion to the extent to which the case calls for pity. A proper object of pity stands in need of something it has not, or is enduring something it were better without. To pity an object is to look down upon it from a higher position. But can this be the relation of His pitiable creature man to "the High and Lofty One"? How can we so think and feel towards the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the supreme Lord of glory, the fountain of life, from whom emanates all strength and blessing, the object of highest worship, in whom all pure creatures are invited to find supreme delight? How can His saints know and enjoy Him for ever, if all the while He is the centre of sorrow and anguish? He demands our sincere and unstinted praise, an acknowledgment of His unsullied majesty self-sufficiency and transcendent excellence; but never our commiseration. To offer Him our

pity were a gratuitous affront to His perfect glory, as if a hungry mendicant should affect to compassionate the poverty of his affluent and bountiful prince.

How foreign is the idea of our pity for God to the representations of His word. Not only is it uniformly silent about any such pity, it abounds in opposite teaching, *e.g.* "The Father of glory." His presence is the light of heaven, where Christ sits on the throne of His glory. And yet we are asked to believe that ineffable glory consists of, or is intermixed with, grief and pain to an extent which makes Him stand in need of pity from His creatures, "as though He needed anything." Is the God, in knowledge of whom consists our supreme happiness (John xvii. 3), one who stands in need of our pity because He is burdened with the sufferings of His creatures?

The proper objects of pity are in ill condition through injury caused by themselves or others, or by what is called misfortune, as the penitent Ninevites, the persecuted Church, the afflicted in body or mind, the poor and needy. If such are the proper objects, pity could not be more misplaced than when exercised towards God. Very emphatic are the Scripture declarations of God's pity for man, while

no intimation is given of man's pity for God.

The people of God are taught to delight themselves in Him (Ps. xxxvii. 4, and ciii.; Isa. lviii. 14, and lxi. 10; Job xxii. 26, and xxvii. 10; Hab. iii. 18; Ps. v. 11, xxxv. 9, and c. 2; Isa. xli. 16; Phil. iv. 4; Rom. v. 11). But can this be in a mind dominated by pity for a suffering God? Can such a God be He, in the attempt to express whose infinite perfections and glorious majesty in songs of praise, we strain our poor language in vain? We have known that "in His presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore"; chaste and abundant enough to attract our victorious Redeemer. Are we henceforth to associate that perfection of bliss, or rather debase it, with piercing and incessant pain? As "the fountain of life," God sends forth the river of His pleasures. But does it issue from a source in which pain and pleasure are intermingled? Is the joy of the Lord into which the righteous shall enter at the great day mixed with trouble and grief? Was the glory of the Father to which the Son returned one with a state of unspeakable suffering? If so, the absolute perfection which saints have rejoiced to see in their heavenly Father is but a pleasant dream. As

therefore reason and Scripture forbid us to doubt the absolute perfection of our beloved and adorable God, we are glad to disbelieve that unhappiness can have any place in His nature.

(6) To argue that, as God has pleasure in the exercise of His love He must have pain in His anger, is less illative than to infer that He is happy in both; bearing in mind that His anger is something very different from man's. The former argument proceeds on a spurious antithesis. The correlative opposite of His delight in love is not the miserable perturbation which anger denotes in fallen man, but the judicial attitude which condemns sin, and tends to punish it. What is denoted by such names as anger wrath hatred fury and indignation may not be enjoyment *in se*; though, as He cannot but be pleased with the steadfastness and sure prevalence of right against wrong, there is a sense in which He must have satisfaction in His condemnation of sin, and overthrow of its power. At any rate His anger cannot be positive pain, or mental confusion, distraction, desperation, or sense of discomfiture. It is rather the antagonism of righteousness in the almighty Ruler towards the wrong-doer; not the weakness or bitterness of one inflamed with resentment, but the unswerving, irresist-

ible purpose of sovereign justice in active opposition to sin.

If God knew His purpose was, like man's, liable to be defeated by sin, He might well suffer painful anxiety; but He knows just the contrary. However low His mercy may stoop to rescue the sinner, and however long His patience may wait, the ultimate victory of His righteousness is sure. The indignation which glows in Him is not the self-disturbing, self-consuming passion of an angry man; but the righteous will and disposition of the Moral Ruler condemning and tending to oppose sin by punishment; needing no impatient feeling to impel its action, and admitting of no element which could disturb its equanimity. He dislikes, disapproves, blames, threatens, punishes; but not with feelings of vindictiveness confusion painful mental agitation or a sense of struggling impotence, which are commonly associated with human indignation. In many places of Scripture His wrath indignation and anger denote His execution of punishment, rather than any emotional agitation in Himself. When these terms are applied to His mental state, they indicate the *moral principles* by which He is actuated towards offenders, rather than passionate feeling. But whatever of feeling may be

intended, it can imply nothing contrary to infinite happiness.* Rather than put into these words as applied to God the significance of imperfection they carry when applied to men, it were better to attach no definite meaning until we found a possible and probable one. But we are not in that predicament of ignorance; seeing an intelligible meaning is supplied by the moral principles and judicial attitude of God towards evil-doers; though further discoveries of the import of these terms may yet be made in harmony with what is already known.

2. *Blessedness*.—If happiness, the opposite of pain grief and all suffering, be not the only element of blessedness, it is, at any rate, a chief and essential ingredient. If blessedness sometimes includes more than happiness, it is never found without it. In some cases the idea of greatness, honour, or ethical goodness seems to be included, or rather involved; but happiness is always included as of the very essence of blessedness.

* Righteousness “has reference to indefeasible distinctions of right and wrong—to moral norms, which even love must respect. Out of righteousness and love in the character of God, again, issues wrath. . . . By wrath is meant the intense moral displeasure with which God regards sin—His holy abhorrence of it—and the punitive energy of His nature which He puts forth against it” (Orr, *Christian View*, p. 95).

Perfect blessedness excludes everything contrary to happiness. It may be that a man in adverse circumstances is pronounced blessed, as in the Beatitudes of Jesus, because, besides the trouble, there is possession or anticipation of some ground of happiness far outweighing the adversity. But that, though real, is not perfect happiness such as the blessedness of God must be, seeing He is absolutely perfect in all His attributes. A God of imperfect blessedness were an imperfect God.

If we say Grace Darling was blessed as the rescuer of wrecked men and women, and John Howard as the prison philanthropist, we mean they were happy in their noble, though disagreeable work, or in subsequent reflection upon it. If we speak of the martyrs as blessed in their torture, we mean they were happy in the midst of suffering for the sake of Christ. If we say men like George Washington were blessed in abiding by truth and honesty, involving them in trouble, we mean they were happy in being virtuous. Their sufferings, strictly speaking, were not the same as their happiness; but its opposite, while yet its concomitant. They were so happy in something that they could be joyful or happy in relation thereto, while unhappy in relation to something else. In speaking of God

as blessed, we intend that He is happy in Himself and in all His works. By an easy and almost unavoidable mental process we may extend the meaning of blessedness so as to include happiness and also the virtue or excellence which is its basis, cause, or occasion. But happiness remains the radical notion; the rest are its accidental associations. It follows that lack of happiness is lack of blessedness, and happiness mingled with unhappiness is imperfect blessedness.

The happiness of God is from the perfection of His nature independently of all other beings. He may delight in the creature; but it is not in the power of the creature to spoil or diminish His infinite blessedness. As ignorance would be the imperfection of His knowledge, so deficiency of happiness would be the imperfection of His blessedness. His infinite excellence renders His blessedness as indefectible and indefeasible as His wisdom or honour.

Happiness has not the ethical excellence of justice or love; but it is an excellence nevertheless, and is closely allied with ethical goodness, indeed its delicious fruit. It is set before man as an end worthy of pursuit; as unhappiness is a result to be deprecated and avoided. "Happy is the people that is in such a case;

yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help." "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom." "He that hath pity on the poor, happy is he." "If you know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." "We call them blessed which endured." "And if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye." * The Beatitudes are a garland of pearls, persuading to ethical goodness by promise of happiness.

Arminius infers the blessedness from the perfection of God: "From this perfection of God, by means of some internal act, His blessedness has its existence; and by means of some (*respectu*) relation of it *ad extra*, His glory exists." "Blessedness is an act of God by which He enjoys His own perfection, that is fully known by His understanding and supremely loved by His will, with (*acquiescentia*) a delightful satisfaction in it." "But this blessedness is so peculiar to God, that it cannot be communicated to any creature." "Glory is the divine excellence above all things." In the view of Arminius, these perfections of God

* Ps. cxliv. 15, and cxlvi. 5; Prov. iii. 13, xiv. 21, xvi. 20, and xxix. 18; John xiii. 17; Jas. v. 11.; 1 Pet. iii. 14.

determine the character of His religion. "This description of the divine nature is the first foundation of all religion. For it is concluded from this perfection and blessedness of God, that the act of religion can be worthily and usefully exhibited to God, to the knowledge of which matter we are brought through the manifestation of the divine glory." *

3. Stephen Charnock, assuming that God's perfect happiness is good, and its opposite evil, and that, therefore, God cannot but will happiness, argues it cogently from His *omnipotence*: "If God be almighty, He can want nothing; all want speaks weakness. If He doth what He will, He cannot be miserable; all misery consists in those things which happen contrary to His will. There is nothing can hinder His happiness, because nothing can resist His power. Since He is omnipotent, nothing can hurt Him, nothing can strip Him of what He hath, of what He is. If He can do whatever He will, He cannot want anything that He wills; He is as happy, as great, as glorious, as He will; for He hath a perfect liberty of will to will, and a perfect power to attain what He will; His will cannot be restrained, nor His power mated. It would be defect in blessedness to will what

* Disputation XXIII. ii. 354, and XX. ii. 347.

He were not able to do : sorrow is the result of want of power, with a presence of will. If He could will anything which He could not effect, He would be miserable, and no longer God. He can do whatsoever He pleases, and therefore can want nothing that pleases Him. He cannot be (perfectly) happy, the original of whose happiness is not in Himself ; nothing can be infinitely happy that is limited and bounded." "He is defective in no blessedness or perfection." * God delights in His love, His justice, and all His perfections. But He cannot delight in unhappiness ; therefore it is not proper to Him. It is an imperfection.

4. Doddridge argues to the same effect from *wisdom power* and *self-sufficiency* : "God is infinitely happy." "His wisdom always enables Him to know, and engages Him to choose what is most conducive to His happiness." "Being omnipotent, He is always able to do whatever he chooses, and above the possibility of being disturbed or hurt by any being whatsoever. To suppose the divine happiness dependent on any creature, would be most absurd ; for then before that creature was produced, He must have been unhappy ; and as He had eternally existed before the production of that

* *Attributes*, i. 135, 268, 477.

creature, He must have been eternally unhappy, *i.e.* of all other beings the most unhappy; which it would be most dishonourable and groundless to imagine." *

5. Arminius finds blessedness in infinite *love*: "God loves Himself with complacency in the perfection of His own nature, wherefore He likewise enjoys Himself. He also loves Himself with the love of complacency in His effects produced." "God is blessed in Himself and in the knowledge of His own perfection. He is, therefore, in want of nothing." † He is "infinitely blessed because He is infinite love." ‡

Dorner also connects blessedness with love and all-sufficiency: "In this love of His, God is the ALL-SUFFICIENT and the BLESSED. . . . The divine blessedness is the harmony and beauty of the divine life and the eternal perception of the same, which is eternal without defect and without a superabundance in itself, and into the holy places of which no disturbance and no endurance find their way. . . . The eternal Sabbath God keeps is the enjoyment of His eternal self-contented life, which is free from hindrances and unrest, and also from daily hardship." §

* *Lectures*, p. 260.

† *Articles*, II. ii. 707.

‡ Steward, *Med. Sov.* ii. 471.

§ *System Doc.* i. 463.

Such is the happiness of Him who reveals Himself in His word. The doxologies which ascribe to Him "blessing" are not merely praise for blessing bestowed on the worshippers, but declarations of blessing in Him. The ascriptions of power, honour, wisdom, and glory in the same doxologies imply that these perfections are in Him; and for the same reason "blessing" implies that which is possessed and enjoyed by Him. Hence He is "the Blessed" (Mark xiv. 61), "the Blessed God" (1 Tim. i. 11), "the Blessed and Only Potentate" (1 Tim. vi. 15), "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 5), "Blessed for evermore" (2 Cor. xi. 31). It is remarkable that in the fullest doxologies and ascriptions of both Old and New Testament saints on earth, as well as in heaven, suffering in God is not appreciated praised or recognised. The thought of it would have chilled the gladness of their *Te Deums*.*

But in a Being of pure and infinite blessedness, suffering, which is disturbance, uneasiness, conflict, weakness, limitation, imperfection of happiness, can never have place. His enjoyment

* See Ex. xv. and xxxiv.; 2 Chron. vi.; Ps. xxxiv., xxxvi., lxvi., lxxxiv., ciii., and cxiii.; Isa. vi.; Rom. xi. 33-36; Eph. i. 3; 2 Cor. i. 3-4; 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16; John iv. 10; Jude 25; Rev. iv., v., vii., and xv.; 1 Pet. v. 10-16.

of His own existence, His delight in action, His pleasure in the good of His creatures, can have no alloy of sorrow pain grief or unhappiness. When, therefore, He is said to be subject to those evils, it must be understood in a sense consistent with the impossibilities of His immaculate nature. Suffering would be loss of inherent excellence, and is therefore impossible to Him who is absolutely perfect. He is "jealous" of His honour, and will on no account part with any portion of it. As the Being of spotless holiness brings Himself into immediate contact with the unholy—the God of love wrestling with the selfishness and malice of man in order to deliver him—without contracting the least speck or stain of impurity; so does the ever Blessed One grapple closely with human misery, to counteract, reduce, or annihilate it, without allowing it to infect His nature or alloy His happiness; His blessedness is as impervious to natural evil as His holiness is to moral. By reason of His infinite perfection, He is proof equally against inoculation by suffering and by sin, its cause.

6. The impassibility of God also follows from His *immutability*; the unchangeableness of His essence, His essential attributes, and His moral principles. If He suffers now, He must have

suffered from eternity, and will suffer through the endless future; in which case, He never knew and never can know perfect happiness; an idea which, as we have already seen, is repellent to what we cannot but think and feel is proper and necessary to the High and Lofty One who is infinite and absolute. Or else His suffering had a beginning, in which case there must have been a moment of transition from a non-suffering state to a suffering; which implies that He then either lost or gained something. If He gained, He was not perfect before; if He lost, He was not perfect after the change. But the infinite can neither gain nor lose. Nor would such a change be merely in respect of something non-essential. To pass from unsullied, unlimited blessedness to partial and mixed, or to change in the reverse order, would affect the well-being of God far too deeply to be compatible with His immutability. While immutability admits of change in His attitude and action towards His responsible creatures, according to their changing conduct towards Him, now punishing and then rewarding, all such change being in strict conformity with His attributes, and the fixed principles of His government, there is no failure of immutability. But a change to or from happiness, in whole or in part, would be a

transmutation of Himself, that is, of His essential state; thus undermining the stability of His other perfections, and of His throne. Against the possibility of such a change we are assured by His own declaration, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. iii. 6). The unchangeableness having its ground in His Godhead (cf. Num. xxiii. 19; Rom. xi. 29), in the Father of lights there "can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning" (Jas. i. 17; Heb. i.). If the commencement of creaturely sin and suffering was the commencement of God's suffering, He was thenceforth not the absolutely perfect Being, free alike from natural and moral evil, that He was before. If He was from eternity unhappy in the foreknowledge of evil, then He was at least, in that respect, eternally imperfect; a thought from which our reason and adoring affection recoil. Hooker says truly, God alone "actually and everlastingly is whatsoever He may be, and . . . cannot hereafter be that which now He is not."* All the lines of evidence go to show that to accept the idea of passibility in God would be to cloud our vision of His glory. A perfect God not impassible is impossible. A perfect God in a state of suffering is a self-contradiction.

* *Ecc. Pol.*, bk. i.

V

THE PENAL CHARACTER OF SUFFERING

1. *THE PROBLEM.*—The incessant, world-wide sufferings of mankind, in soul body and estate, so varied, manifold, and persistent, all leading on to death, admit of no dispute with regard to their reality. The difficulty is to explain them in harmony with the justice of the Supreme Ruler—that righteousness which invariably gives and claims what is due, which from its very nature must insist on fulfilment of all its claims, which, being united with omnipotence, cannot ultimately fail of attaining its rightful end, which creates the distinction of “ought” and “ought not,” which in its radical notion is essentially different from benevolence or love, and therefore cannot be resolved into a mode of love, but is co-ordinate, co-essential, co-eternal, and co-operative with it. Love is that which desires, seeks, or enjoys the happiness of its object, and, according to the nature of the case, may desire

to possess, experience, or commune with it. By no process of explanation can either of these two great principles be resolved into a modification of the other, as pity is a modification of love, and faithfulness of justice. In other connections both words are often used in other senses; but in this discussion the meanings just named are those intended. Change the words or their meanings as we may, the two principles remain radically distinct from each other, both in our subjective conception and their objective reality, so long as God remains what He is and we remain subject to our present laws of thought. All attempts to explain essential justice as a form or expression of love end in confusion.

The problem is, how so much, or *any*, human suffering and death is consistent with the perfect justice of the Sovereign Ruler of the world. Why does not the Almighty secure to all men pure happiness without the least intermixture of unhappiness?

2. *Unsatisfactory Solutions.*—To affirm that every man suffers, in his present life, neither more nor less than the punishment due to his personal sin, is not only contrary to patent facts, such as the prosperity of the wicked and the calamities of the holy, the diseases and privations of innocent children, and many other

glaring irregularities; but is repudiated by the moral Ruler Himself, as in the case of Job, the man born blind (John ix.), the victims of cruelty in Galilee, and of misfortune at Siloam (Luke xiii.). No doubt much of human suffering is preventible by man, and might be avoided. But when all which falls upon each individual through his wilful sin or foolish perversity, and all that comes by the misconduct of fellow descendants of Adam has been set aside, there remains an amount of unavoidable misery and loss which virtually leaves the problem unsolved.

No better is the explanation that the suffering comes by chance or accident, and that God has nothing to do with it. Not to mention that suffering and death are at present in the order of nature under divine government, this line of defence implies ignorance, impotence, or indifference on the part of the Ruler, any one of which would be a reflection on His Godhead, and all of which He expressly disclaims. "I the Lord make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." "Shall evil befall a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (and Jer. xxv. 29). Nor is the theodicy satisfactory which tells us God is under such natural limitations as make it impossible for Him to produce happiness in His moral and sentient creatures without a propor-

tion of natural evil. There is here a question of justice to His subjects as well as one of natural power. If we are to believe He has not power to avoid injustice in His treatment of them, the problem presses upon us with redoubled force. This solution defends the perfection of God by explaining it away; and reduces Him from the rank of holy almighty Lord to be the slave of circumstances.

To say suffering serves as useful discipline, or warns us off dangerous courses, or enables us to diagnose physical disease, or makes happiness all the sweeter by contrast, may well show how the evil is made subservient to good; but it does nothing to justify the original infliction or permission of the evil on the part of the omnipotent Ruler. If, as Dr. J. Baldwin Brown says, the economy of grace "changed the misery of man the sinner into a discipline instead of a doom," the allusion to "the sinner" reminds us that the misery was at first a punishment. But for sin, how was it just to place mankind under the crushing weight? * For "instead," it would be more accurate to say, *as well as* a doom.

* As to such discipline, "Does it explain all? . . . does it follow that a world such as this, with its manifold disorders, would have been a suitable abode for an unfallen race; or that it would have been righteous to expose such a race to these calamities; or that, in the case of pure beings, less violent and

Nor is the natural evil justified by pointing to a happier state awaiting us beyond the grave. To heap pleasure on those who have been subjected to undeserved pain and death may show a benevolent disposition to make all possible amends for the injustice; as when a father is first cruel to his child, and then lavishes indulgence on him. The subsequent kindness does not render the imposition of pain and death due and therefore just.

To affirm that, in all or the greater part of human suffering, God is far away the greatest sharer is another of the inadequate and inadmissible solutions offered. If God's alleged suffering were a fact, how could miserable man extract comfort from it? To be told another endures infinitely more pain than himself, and that other the one from whom the infliction comes, is poor consolation to an innocent sufferer. But even if the suffering alleged afforded any sympathetic help, it would do nothing to prove the undeserved infliction just. For if not due, it cannot be just, however great the suffering of another in sympathy or pity.

painful methods of education would not have sufficed? Of course, if this method of arguing were admitted, the existence of moral evils would have to be justified on the same ground, for in conflict with these, even more than with outward misfortune, is the highest type of character developed" (Orr, *Christian View*, p. 223).

The design of this discussion is to show that God, as God, cannot suffer. The point here is that, if He could and did suffer, that would not justify the direct or indirect imposition of undeserved suffering on the creature. A sovereign, without consulting the wishes of his subjects, may wilfully plunge them and himself into war and slavery, and he himself be the greatest victim of the disaster; but the fact that he fares the worst does not in any degree make his action just to his subjects.

3. *True Solution.*—The only solution is that of the apostle, who, recognising that up to a certain point God deals with all men in their solidarity, as *one*, together choosing acting enjoying or suffering in their constituted representative, Adam; and beyond that point deals with them as separate individuals, each having his own private account with the Moral Ruler, and acting on his own responsibility, tells us, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. v. 12); "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. xv. 22); and yet, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4).

Thus, while each member of the race has his own sphere of freedom and proportionate responsibility within which he is the arbiter of his own

future destiny, the suffering and death of the race in its unity is due to the sin of the race in its unity. As part of the race, every man fell by sin in Adam, his first representative head; as he was redeemed in Christ, his last representative Head. In this view all man's sufferings and death are due to his sin, and therefore perfectly just; notwithstanding that divine wisdom and goodness, to so great an extent, utilise the penal suffering as chastisement and discipline for human welfare. Harnack remarks that "suffering always bound up with penal justice" was the doctrine of Origen.* Assuming that man's present suffering is the result of his fall by sin, who can assert that suffering, in any degree, would have been experienced by man had he not sinned? Jesus Christ was "made sin." How? Culpable He could not be. The only explanation and justification of His suffering is that He became liable to the punishment of sin not His own. But that implies that His sufferings stood in close and necessary relation to sin.

That suffering may be punitive and at the same time useful as discipline, is manifest. In the natural government of God pain is appointed to follow disregard of law, in order to prevent repetition of such conduct, and to train us to do

* *Hist. Dogma*, vol. iv. ch. iv.

better for ourselves. To put it in Bishop Butler's words, "If, for example, the pain which we feel upon doing what tends to the destruction of our bodies, suppose on too near approaches to fire, or upon wounding ourselves, be appointed by the Author of nature to prevent our doing what thus tends to our destruction; this is altogether as much an instance of His punishing our actions, and consequently of our being under His government, as declaring by a voice from heaven, that if we acted so, He would inflict such pain upon us, and inflicting it, whether it be greater or less." * There are ways in which sin is turned to account for good, *e.g.* it brings into view depths of mercy which might not otherwise have been seen; but that does not lessen the inherent evil of sin. Similarly, to utilise punishment does not make it no longer punishment, or a whit less natural evil *in se*.

It may be said a parent sometimes causes pain to his child which is not as punishment for any wrong the child has done, but is intended for his future benefit, as in vaccination or other necessary physical operation. Without laying too much stress on the answer that it is due in the sense that the father owes it to the child, it is sufficient to reply that, whether ethically due

* *Analogy*, pt. i. ch. ii.

from the father or not, the pain is, again, part of the multiform, continuous, and universal penalty due to the generic sin of the race, in the fulfilment of which the course of nature is made to play so great a part; it may be by change of nature's original laws, or by change of man's relation thereto, thus for man, at least, constituting a kind of second nature which is at once, through sin, punitive, and, through grace, ameliorative (cf. Eph. ii. 3; Gen. iii. 17-19, and ii. 8-17).

Sin and its punishment may be so far apart, or the links of government so much hidden in the multitudinous complexity of human affairs as to render it impossible for us to trace out all the processes of causation, but none the less "suffering is inexplicable except on the supposition of guilt." * As concisely put by Wesley, "had there been no sin, there would have been no pain. But pain (supposing God to be just) is the necessary effect of sin." † As nothing can account for the effect but its proper cause, the only adequate solution of natural evil within the domain of the Holy One is the existence of moral evil. Nothing else can justify His direct or indirect infliction of pain on His moral sub-

* Leathes, *Christian Creed*, p. 127.

† *Works*, vi. 214, 215.

jects. He could no more be the original cause of natural evil or suffering than of moral evil or sin. To create a moral being with original causative power to sin or not as he of himself may determine, and to appoint suffering as sin's penalty, and in case of sin to enforce the penalty, did not make the Creator the original cause of sin and suffering. The original cause of both was the self-determining sinner. Only on that view can we justify suffering under divine government.*

Beholding a prison in which, with the exception of the officials, all the men and women are forcibly confined, deprived of civil liberty and power to enjoy life, all subjected to suffering by the ruling authority, the question arises, how is the nation, or its government, justified in so treating those inmates? It is no answer to say they are performing useful work, or learning useful lessons, or deterring other citizens from misconduct. Such considerations would not clear the authorities from the guilt of cruel injustice. The only justification is that the sufferers have

* "Pain is something to remind us of the evil of sin . . . so all the pain that darkens this world is something to indicate how bitterly hard a thing is sin. Every child knows that, had there been no sin, there would have been no pain." "All the pain you have ever suffered was the effect of sin" (*Counsel and Comfort*, A. K. H. Boyd, p. 225).

deserved their treatment by violation of law. Only so can we "justify the ways of God to men," in subjecting them to sorrow pain and death. The question is not the uses of adversity, or how are the sufferings of mankind turned to good account, but how are they *just* in Him who inflicts them? The only satisfactory answer is that man has sinned, and suffering and death are the penal consequence. They are just because deserved by man's sin. This solution does not cease to be the only adequate one, because, from the standpoint of rationalistic humanitarianism, ridicule and denunciation are poured upon it. In the light of holy Scripture, it continues to hold the field, and is the only theodicy which satisfies man's reason and moral sense.

In opposition to the belief that all our suffering is penal, however remote in time or place from the act of sin, reference is often made to the geological proofs of suffering and death in the animal world prior to the sin and the existence of man. The priority is said to prove that the suffering and death could not be by reason of man's sin. In reply, it is said that the death, even if violent, in primeval animals might be comparatively, if not quite painless, as animals neither reflect upon nor anticipate their ills. Unless we attribute personality to them, the

question of justice to them does not arise. Moreover, if they did suffer, that would not affect the contention that all human suffering and death are the penal effect of human sin. A more important reply is that the close connection between the condition of inferior animals and the condition and conduct of man—the lordship ascribed to him in Scripture and confirmed by nature and experience—make it reasonable to suppose that the Creator, having designed the dependence of inferior creatures on the will and behaviour of man, to share his lot of good or evil; and foreseeing man's fall by sin, proleptically constituted the lower orders under conditions of suffering suited to the state subsequent to man's foreseen fall; man the evident culmination and crown of mundane creation and evolution, the intended possessor and master of the world, being by and because of his ethical, spiritual, and personal nature exalted far above all the rest. The existence of man with the rank of supremacy was itself the end to which all inferior orders were subordinate and preparatory. This preadaptation of nature to the character and conditions of its future lord has been aptly styled anticipatory, supralapsarian, and proleptic.

Granted that this explanation is not a demonstration, but somewhat theoretical and speculat-

ive, it is not for that reason necessarily without argumentative value, inasmuch as it refutes the allegation of an impossibility. The point of the objection is that pre-Adamite suffering in this world *could not* be by reason of man's sin. It asserts an impossibility, and its force as an objection depends on the truth of that assertion. All the answer required is a proof, not that the pre-Adamite suffering *was*, but that, for aught we know, it *might be* introduced proleptically because of man's sin. And that is just what our answer does.

4. But if all human suffering is penal, how can it be shared by the Holy One? It does not cease to be penal by becoming also disciplinary, ameliorative, or sympathetic. If His infinite blessedness did not preclude His enduring any of our pain, it would still be precluded by His justice, because it has a penal character. If all our suffering is punishment of sin, to make God its subject is to attribute to Him, not sin, but punishment; which, besides detracting from His happiness, does Him grievous wrong; for the claims of justice are fully met by the suffering of the offender or his atoning substitute. Penal suffering has in it something of ignominy, degradation, loss of dignity; not only because it is painful, but because of its relation to guilt. The

subject of punishment is the object of opposition to justice. But God, who is essentially just, cannot be opposed to Himself. Penal suffering is a kind of reproach, a humiliation in the eye of sovereign righteousness, none of which can be proper to God. As we know of no human suffering which is not penal, *i.e.* the punishment of sin, however it may be utilised as chastening or discipline, or however remote it be in time or place from the culpable act, we know of none which could be proper to the holy and ever blessed God. To put Himself under our suffering would be to put Himself under our penalty, seeing all ours has the penal character, and does not lose it by acquiring additional and beneficial qualities. By enduring our suffering He would receive the blow of justice in vindication of itself. But can justice strike and injure Him who is perfectly just, and incapable of damage? When an innocent man suffers misfortune, or cruel treatment, we affirm it to be no ignominy, dishonour, or punishment for sin. True, not for any sin committed by him individually, but as part of the consequence judicially inflicted on mankind for its generic sin, his suffering has the quality of punishment. And if the same consequence were extended to the state and experience of God, it would retain the same quality.

It may be pleaded that God does not endure any of the penal suffering due to sin, but something over and above it; something non-penal, in the manner of sympathy, as an innocent citizen may suffer sympathetically with a criminal under torture without feeling the torture himself. On this plea it is pertinent to observe that, in the case of wicked rebels concerning whom God is supposed to suffer, there can be no sympathy in Him with them; though there may be pity, which in Him is not necessarily painful. And if God does not suffer the same thing as man suffers, it is difficult to see what else He needs to suffer. Whatever good He may incline to do His enemies, He can as well do without suffering.

Moreover, advocates of God's passibility argue from sympathy, as meaning that the sympathiser actually takes over and into himself the pain of the object. If it be not so, they must relinquish much of their argumentation for a suffering and pitiable God, since that meaning of sympathy is necessary to the cogency of their reasoning. The idea of pain taken over by the sympathiser from the sufferer to himself abandoned, it is then easy to think of God's sympathy as very real, yet free from suffering; which leaves no element in sympathy to warrant

the inference of suffering in the sympathy of God.

The suffering endured in sympathy amounts to a large proportion of the unhappiness endured by the human race ; but it comes by the present constitution of things under the moral government of God. How then can His government in this respect be proved just to the sufferers, except as the pain of sympathy, like all other sufferings of mankind, was deserved by the sin of mankind viewed in its solidarity ? But no such explanation of painful sympathy in God is available. He is not so identified with the creature as to be one with him in wrong-doing, or in its consequent punishment. No such community of moral actions and their judicial results is discernible, or possible between God and men as subsists between all human persons ; except in the vicarious position of the Word made flesh, which cannot just here come into the reckoning. As God is incapable of partnership with man in sin, so He is of partnership in the endurance of sin's penalty. Hence when, in wondrous love, He willed to bear the punishment, He had to assume a nature capable of enduring penal suffering. Seeing that if He as God suffered in sympathy with man, He would be a sharer in the punishment of man's sin, which

would be neither just nor possible, we are obliged to believe He does not so suffer.

Again, were it made out that God suffered something not the same as man's suffering, that is, not man's pain, and consequently that our objection to His suffering penally had no force, it would equally follow that the argument on the other side, based on the transfer of man's pain to God, against which our objection was directed, was also inconclusive. An objection can be dispensed with, if the position objected to be given up by its holder. But that moral and intelligent beings can be subject to suffering not due, directly or indirectly, to wrong-doing, and therefore not penal, is more than doubtful. The imposition of pain on sinless angels would be hard to justify, if it were in no wise traceable to sin in any party. For the creature to force such pain on the Creator is out of the question—an impossible limitation of the infinite; yet that seems to be involved in the reasoning of the passibilists, when they assume that the sinful exercise of man's free power must hurt the feelings of God. For God to force pain on Himself would be a wrong to Himself. Not being deserved by or due to Himself or any other party, it would not be just. It is due to Him as absolutely holy to be absolutely free

from the disability humiliation and injury of pain; therefore its infliction, even by His own will, would be unjust to Himself, as it would to attempt to despoil Himself of knowledge or supremacy. How then can there be suffering which is not penal? and how can the immaculate Ruler be the subject of penal suffering? If neither be possible, it follows that, however great and far-reaching His compassion, pain in God is impossible. If there were any suffering which was not the result of sin, we should be at a loss to account for it in harmony with divine righteousness.

The innocent citizen just mentioned does not, strictly speaking, sympathise with the criminal in the sense of sharing his pain, but in the sense of feeling pity for him; but in God pain need not be associated with pity. It is a combination suitably incident to man's present state; but neither suitable nor possible to the state of the blessed God. The citizen may have pain through the reaction of imagination upon his feelings; a process to which God is not liable. And the pain felt by the innocent sympathiser, though not borne as punishment of the criminal's misdeeds, so far from having no relation to sin, is part of that sum-total of penal suffering which came by the sin of the race.

To think of all natural evil as, directly or indirectly, the judicially administered consequence of moral evil, is to conceive an intelligible account of the presence of suffering under the government of the almighty, all wise, and all holy God. Nor is any other explanation of suffering satisfactory to our rational and moral judgment. But that excludes suffering from the experience of God, inasmuch as what is due only to sin is improper to Him.

It is true, penal suffering may be transferred, as when the only-begotten Son suffered "the just for the unjust"; but in order to become capable of that experience, He had to become "the Son of Man." In order to "taste death," He had to be made for a little while "lower than the angels." That "the Lord of glory" might be "crucified," He had to assume a nature capable of crucifixion, and of such identity with the guilty race as would make it just for Him to share the penalty. Accordingly, "the Word was made flesh." The question here is whether the divine nature of the supreme Lord could share the penalty of sinful man. We maintain that it could no more endure the penal sufferings than the penal death of man.

VI

PERSON AND SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

1. *THE QUESTION.*—The question of impassibility emerges, and has often been discussed in relation to the divine-human person and work of our Lord. Here again, in this particular relation, as in relation to the whole subject, the question is not whether Christ suffered in His humanity, being sustained by His divine power; and so, being but one person in the two natures, could have suffering and death affirmed of that one person as properly as omnipotence or eternity, under any of His names human, divine, or official. This is precisely what is done in the New Testament. We are told the Lord of glory was crucified: the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, is at the same time “of the seed of David” and “the Son of God with power”: He who was God’s equal endured the death of the cross: we have redemption “through His blood” who

is the image of God and Maker of all things : the Son of God could be slain by wicked hands : Jesus was both Lord and God : the Son of Man was at once in heaven and on earth : in Christ was all the fulness of the Godhead.* For this mode of speech there was good reason in the unity of His person. It shows how the Mediator's work had in it all the divine and human qualities predicated of His divine-human person ; and consequently had a propitiatory fitness and value, otherwise inconceivable. As Charnock well puts it, "He had a nature whereby to suffer for us, and a nature whereby to be meritorious in those sufferings."† The Scriptures as clearly distinguish the two natures as they affirm the unity of His person.‡ Hence the first or a later § Council of Toledo asserted, "There are in Him two natures, God and man ; and yet not two sons, or two Gods, but the same (God and man) one person in both natures, who suffered grief and death for our salvation, not in the power of His Godhead, but in the infirmity of His manhood."

Nor is the question whether it is possible for the exalted human nature of Christ to suffer in

* Rom. i. 3, 4 ; Phil. ii. 5-8 ; Col. i. 13-17 ; Heb. x. 29 ; John xx. 28, and iii. 13 ; Col. ii. 9.

† Vol. ii. p. 382.

‡ Rom. i. 3, 4 ; John i. 14 ; Rom. ix. 5 ; John iii. 12, 13.

§ Hefele thinks a later (*Hist. Con.*).

sympathy with mortal man, though it may be noticed as a side issue. Were it proved that His glorified humanity actually and continuously suffers in sympathy with His afflicted followers on earth, it would not follow that His divine nature is, or can be, subject to suffering in the least degree. But both propositions are without foundation in holy Scripture, our one source of knowledge on the state of the ascended Lord.

The question is whether, either on earth or in heaven, it was ever possible for the divine nature of Christ, *as such*, to be the subject of suffering. For if it was, it is useless to assert the impassibility of the infinite Father; and if it was not, it is equally vain to deny that impassibility.

2. *Historical*.—With regard to the *history* of the question, the absolute freedom of our Lord's divine nature from suffering of every kind, is a truth for which the ancient Church contended earnestly against various classes of heretics, until it was recognised as an established New Testament doctrine; and it has retained its hold on the leading teachers of the churches to the present day.*

In the sixteenth century Bullinger wrote: "We rightly say that God suffered, and was nailed on the cross for us; though He which suffered, suffered

* See p. 17 *supra*.

according to that only which could suffer" (1 Pet. iv. 1). . . . The first Toledan Council following him (Peter), decreed in these words: 'If any shall say or believe that the Godhead may be born, let him be accursed. If any shall say or believe that the Deity of Christ may be turned, changed, or subject to suffering, let him be accursed.' . . . And Damasus, Bishop of Rome, saith, 'If any shall say, that in suffering on the cross, the Son of God and God suffered pain, and not the flesh and the soul which He put on in the form of a servant . . . let him be accursed.' And Bishop Theodoretus . . . said, 'As man He suffered, but as God He was not subject to suffering.' " *

"His compassions are not lessened by an assumption of our humanity, but an experimental compassion gained in His human nature, which the divine was not capable of, because of the perfection of impassibility. . . . What He had a real feeling of on earth He must have a memorative feeling of in heaven." †

More at large Bishop Pearson sets forth the same view: "These (human soul and body) were the proper subject of His passion; nor could He suffer anything but in both or either of these two. . . . And so God the Son did

* *Sermon VI.*, iv. 268.

† Charnock, *Works*, ii. 1122.

suffer, not in that nature in which He was begotten of the Father before all worlds, but in that flesh which by His incarnation He became. . . . Far be it therefore from us to think that the Deity, which is immutable, could suffer; which only hath immortality, could die. The conjunction with humanity could put no imperfection upon the divinity; nor can that infinite nature, by any external acquisition, be any way changed in its intrinsical and essential perfections." It may be as truly said, in Christ "God suffered," as it may be said "God was man," because He who was God had a nature in which He was human and suffered. "He suffered, not in His Deity, which is impassible, but in His humanity, which He assumed, clothed with our infirmities."

Pearson sees the impassibility of our Lord's divine nature in the incorruptible perfection of God's blessedness: "For while we prove the person (divine-human Christ) suffering to be God, we may seem to deny the passion of which the perfection of the Godhead is incapable. The divine nature is of infinite and eternal happiness, never to be disturbed by the least degree of infelicity, and therefore subject to no sense of misery. Wherefore, while we profess that the Son of God did suffer for us, we must so far

explain our assertion, as to deny that the divine nature of our Saviour suffered. For being (seeing) the divine nature of the Son is common to the Father and the Spirit, if that had been the subject of His passion, then must the Father and the Spirit have suffered. Wherefore, as we ascribe the passion to the Son alone, so must we attribute it to that nature which is His alone, that is, the human. And then neither the Father nor the Spirit will appear to suffer, because neither the Father nor the Spirit, but the Son alone, is man, and so capable of suffering.” *

To the same effect is the language of Dr. W. B. Pope : “ We need not make the most distant approach to the ancient heresy that ascribed suffering to God ; but we may boldly say that such is the absolute unity of the two natures in Christ, that the suffering of His human soul could not be more truly divine suffering were the tremendous error found to be truth. It is the blood and passion of God : the atonement stands or falls with it.” †

Richard Watson gave the same doctrine in the words of Dr. Hill : “ ‘ We may admit that the Godhead cannot suffer. . . . But from the uniform language of Scripture . . . we infer that there was a value, a merit in the sufferings of the Person superior to that which belonged

* *Creed*, Art. iv.

† *Person of Christ*, p. 47.

to the sufferings of any other ; and as the same Scriptures intimate, in numberless places, the strictest union between the divine and human nature of Christ, by applying to Him promiscuously the actions which belong to each nature, we hold that it is impossible for us to separate, in our imagination, the peculiar value which they affix to His sufferings from the peculiar dignity of His person.' " *

3. *Whence the Value.*—It has been argued that as there was an atoning value in the sufferings of Christ far beyond what could arise from His human suffering, there must have been suffering in His divine nature to account for such value ; that is, the value was derived from suffering in the divine nature, and not from the divine dignity of the person who suffered in His human nature. Were this argument sound, it would prove too much for the purpose of its authors, namely, that the divine nature died. For the value is particularly attributed to His death. It might therefore *a fortiori* be also argued that as sufficient value could not be derived from the death of His human nature, His divine nature must have died.

The argument overlooks the value which might belong to the sufferings of the human

* *Institutes*, ii. 450.

nature by reason of the unity and identity of that nature with the divine, in the same one person, and also the sustenance afforded by the divinity to human sorrow and agony immeasurably deeper than were ever borne by any mere man.

Of the superhuman value of the sufferings there can be no question. Peter notes a preciousness in the shed blood with which silver and gold could not compare (1 Pet. i. 18-19). Paul estimated the worth of the blood as sufficient to purchase the church (Acts xx. 28). Something in Christ made His sacrificial death efficacious to save men from guilt when the blood of bulls and goats failed (Heb. ix. 13-14). By virtue of His blood He "loosed us from our sins" (Rev. i. 5). His blood is of value sufficient to cleanse us from all sin (1 John i. 7). Clearly the value was superhuman, and came from His divinity. But how? Not by pain and death inflicted on the divine; for of suffering those things the divine nature was incapable; but by the divine, impassible nature making itself personally one with the suffering human nature, imparting to it the credit and worth of Deity, He out of infinite love, presented an offering of moral and juridical value sufficient to satisfy the inexorable demands of eternal justice "for the sins of the whole world." In those sufferings

the divine could not participate; but it could render them a support without which the human could never have borne them.

From the human alone, value so great could not come. The gift was nothing less than God's only-begotten *Son* (John iii. 16; Rom. viii. 3, 4, 32; Gal. iv. 4-5). If the value had come by suffering in the divine nature, that value must have been so great, not because it was so much suffering; or its measure might have been equalled by the total suffering of the human race; but because it was the suffering of a divine person. But that would still mean that the dignity of the divine person gave value to the suffering; the worth being derived not from the intrinsic quality, or the measure of the suffering, but from the greatness and rank of the person who suffered. It is the same principle on which we say the human suffered, and had its value not so much from its kind or measure of suffering, as from the divine greatness of the person who suffered it in His passible nature. The difference is, that in one case the merit or value is derived from suffering which is both human and divine; and in the other the suffering is all human. In either case the indispensable worth is chiefly derived from the infinite greatness of the person.

The notion of value so derived is confirmed by representing His sufferings and death as a "*ransom*," or ransom-price, offered to obtain the liberation of lost man (Matt. xx. 28 ; Tit. ii. 14). When the ransom-price is a living person, its value depends on his personal rank and worth. As He who washed the feet of His disciples, though the deed was actually performed by His human nature, being the Son of God, rendered the act of unspeakably greater worth than it could have been if performed by a person not divine ; so the divinity of His person caused what He endured in His humanity to be of worth sufficient to atone for sin.

It is noteworthy that the sufferings of so extraordinary value ascribed to Christ are always of a *human kind*, such as are not proper or possible to a divine nature. He shed His blood, that is, gave up His human life ; He was made lower than the angels in order to taste death ; He offered His "body" in sacrifice ; He was found in fashion as a man in order to humble Himself to the death of the cross ; He bore our sins in His own body on the tree ; He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. These are all proper to the humanity, though predicated of His whole divine-human person. But these sufferings had their concentrated force and con-

summation in His *death*. Was the divine in Him subject to that? If not, why should it be supposed to have been subject to the lesser and preparatory degrees of suffering? He redeemed us "by means of death"; but surely the death was confined to His humanity. If it be replied that the divine might be in full sympathy with the suffering humanity, we can readily agree, on the understanding that it was sympathy infinitely rich in benevolence, but unalloyed by the mental pain which naturally and usefully associates itself with human sympathy under the present conditions of life on earth.

As the Levitical offerings were of different values according to their kinds, so the offering of Christ as a bleeding sacrifice was immeasurably of the highest value, because through the incarnation the stamp of divine worth was impressed upon it. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot unto God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. ix. 14). That the "eternal Spirit" means the divine nature of Christ, may be concluded from its antithesis to the priests of the Mosaic economy offering the blood of bulls and goats. If the blood of animals offered by human priests availed in any sense or degree,

how much more availing is the blood of Christ offered by His divine nature as belonging to it? The comparison shows the immense superiority of the latter, because it was the offering of the divine as well as the human. Taken for the Holy Ghost the phrase is hardly intelligible. How would the Holy Ghost be antithetical to, or comparable with the sacrificing priests? If we could form an idea of His being either the sacrifice offered or the agent offering it, how would that account for the more availing character of the sacrifice? And how would His agency be peculiar to Christ's sacrifice? For His aid would not be entirely refused to the Levitical priests. On the other hand, it is not difficult to understand how the offering of the blood of Christ being made by His divine nature, as compared with the Levitical sacrifices, must be far away more efficacious to atone for sin, the adjective "eternal" indicating at once the divinity of Him who was both priest and victim, and the endlessness of the benefit to those whom He saves "to the uttermost."

This interpretation is confirmed by comparison of other places: "Concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by

the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 3, 4). As Philippi remarks, the Holy Ghost is never elsewhere in the New Testament called "the Spirit of holiness" (*πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνη*). Here "the Spirit of holiness" is the correlative, counterpart, and contrast of "the flesh," or humanity; which, with Christ as subject, could not well mean the Third divine Person, but which is strictly and obviously true of our Lord's divine nature. The resurrection is the proof that He is the Son of God with power as to His divine nature; while only in some obscure sense, if any, could it be a proof that He was Son of God with power according to the Holy Ghost. Again, "But the Lord (to whom men turn for liberty) is the Spirit," or "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 17), must be taken for the Second Person of the Trinity, who, after His resurrection especially, was known to the disciples as "The Lord." It is in harmony with these instances that we take "the eternal Spirit," in Heb. ix. 14, to be the divine nature of Christ. "God is Spirit."

But in this passage the aim of the writer is to show the surpassing value of the sacrifice made by Christ when He offered up Himself to atone for sin. The efficacious value was derived not merely from His blood-shedding, nor merely from the spotlessness of what He offered, both

of which were necessary, but especially from the fact that He who offered up His life was divine. Though the suffering of death could not be in the divine, it was the suffering of death by one who was divine as well as human. The priestly act of offering was the voluntary act of the human and the divine in one person. The loss of life was suffered in the human; but it was His who, in His impassible nature, was divine. Hence the transcendent, all-sufficient value denoted by the words, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

It is difficult to find analogies with which to illustrate the effect of this unity of person in the two natures, seeing the incarnation was unique, and in kind so far removed from all other events. But the Scriptures unhesitatingly ascribe the human suffering, not to the human nature alone, but to the one divine-human nature. Some faint analogy may be seen in the accepted idea that the same degree of punishment inflicted on a great prince is a greater homage to law than on a person of much lower rank. This shows how personal dignity may lend importance

to an act; but it is not parallel to the case of Christ, where the two natures are united.

Although the divine nature could not be itself subject to suffering, it was so closely identified with all that was comprised in His person, that the suffering was far more intimately and really His than anything could be which belonged to another person—His, in a way which enstamped upon it the seal of His proprietorship, and gave it the importance and value of that identity—His, in a sense which made Him responsible for accepting it, and in which He supplied the strength necessary to its endurance—His, as the death of Calvary was His, not because He as God endured it, but because it was comprehended in the experience of His person, and so had a corresponding momentousness. It made the transaction the humiliation of the co-equal Son of God to privation pain sorrow and death, with proportionate efficacy in the recovery of a perishing world. In virtue of His one personality, the states and actions of either nature could be estimated as the states and actions of His whole person; somewhat as what belongs particularly either to a man's body or soul is predicated of the whole man.

If it were true that the sufferings of our Lord's human nature could not derive susten-

ance and honour and value sufficient to render them a propitiation, that would not prove there was suffering in the divine. The inference would rather be that they were inadequate to the work of atonement for sin. Even for so great an end as atonement we cannot divest the Infinite of His perfection of impassibility. But we are not in that dilemma. The impassibility of God and the sufficiency of Christ's sufferings to atone for sin are both true. The sufferings, like the death, were *His*, though not endured in His divine nature; as the omniscience and omnipotence were *His*, though not in the human nature.

In the atonement the necessary equivalence was of value to satisfy justice; value accruing from the fact of suffering the penalty of sin, and the greatness of the person who bore it. None the less was it so because He bore it in His passible nature and not in His impassible. That He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death is predicated of the divine-human person; and its value must be measured by the dignity of the person.

4. *Why Incarnated.*—For what end was the Son of God incarnated? “That He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man.” Clearly “the Word was made flesh” in order to acquire

a passible nature in which to suffer and die. Why did He empty Himself and assume the form of a servant, and the fashion of a man, "the likeness of men"? That He might humble Himself and be "obedient unto death." Why, when He came to do the will of God, was a "body" prepared for Him? That He might offer it in sacrifice for sins, once for all. He became man in order "that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death"; that, as the High Priest, He might "make propitiation for the sins of the people." All this implies that, by His incarnation, He assumed a passible nature, because as God He had it not.

5. *Pity*.—As to man's pity for Christ as a sufferer, He never showed the least sign of either desiring or needing it, even in behalf of His sorrowing soul; and still less of His Deity. It never seems to have occurred to His most devoted disciples to offer it to Him. When, after His ascension, the apostles grasped the design and method of His work, they dwelt on His love and power and righteousness and amazing condescension; they adored Him as the Redeemer of the race "by means of death" and resurrection and intercession; but they never saw in Him an object of pity. They depict

Him in shame grief anguish death and victory ; but they never talk of pitying Him. That would have been to indulge in a misplaced and sickly sentiment. Their feeling in view of His deep humiliation was not compassionate regret, but gratitude and thankful joy. The healthy state of feeling is indicated in the words of Dr. Stanley Leathes : " We dare not say that we are moved with compassion for our blessed Lord. We dare not presume to approach Him with anything like the sentiment of pity." " The sober, undoubted truth that God is a being ' without body, parts, or passions,' must correct our ideas of Christ at the right hand of God." *

6. *Humanity Limited*.—It is held that our exalted High Priest is filled with grief at the thought of all the suffering borne by men on earth, especially by His own beloved people. This may mean that He endures it in His divine, or in His human nature. Considering what millions there are in the world with or for whom Christ is supposed to suffer, and how much of the suffering is hidden in men's hearts, requiring nothing less than omniscience to be able to see understand and sympathise with it all, and with each individual sufferer, it would appear that such suffering could not find room

* *Christian Creed*, pp. 122, 123, 127, 233.

for itself in His finite humanity. But we have seen how foreign is pain to true divinity. As, therefore, His human nature is incapable of at once perceiving and bearing suffering so vast in amount, and His divine is incapable of suffering in any degree, the notion that all the sufferings of men on earth are at least equally suffered by our glorified Lord must be dismissed as untrue and impossible.

With regard to suffering in the human nature of our heavenly King, it may be repeated here that, if it were true, that would in no measure prove the passibility of His divine nature. But there is good reason for believing that He suffers in neither nature. This is not saying that His human nature may not increase in happiness. For whatever is finite is capable of increase or decrease. His human nature may therefore be absolutely free from suffering, yet not be in itself infinitely happy. Blessed beyond all other created beings, the bliss of His finite nature may ever become more. But it does affirm that pain, which, as Lotze says, is disturbance of life and progress, can have no place in the exalted Christ.

7. *Change of State—Humiliation to Exaltation.*
—It is needful to observe that the Scriptures regard His ascension as a great transition,

marking an immense contrast between His states before and after the change. Before, He is the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; despised and rejected of men, sounding depths of agony never touched by any other, forsaken, tortured, desolate, heartbroken, dying. After, He is exalted a prince and a Saviour, sitting at the right hand of God the Father in glory, above all principedoms and powers, receiving the homage of enraptured saints and angels, King of kings, and Lord of lords, crowned with glory and honour, one with the Father as the light of the new Jerusalem, thousands of thousands in His praise acclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Before, were the predicted "sufferings of Christ"; after, "the glories that should follow." The appointed order was that the Messiah should "suffer these things," and then "enter into His glory." When He cried, "It is finished," He was at the end of His suffering, and the commencement of pure unending happiness. "Christ hath *once* suffered for sins." "Nor yet that He should offer Himself often . . . but now once in the end of the world."

Very striking is the difference between these two successive states in the Hebrew Epistle,

e.g. "Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God" (xii. 2); or, as Wesley paraphrases, "*Patiently and willingly endured the cross*, with all the pain annexed thereto, *and is set down* where there is fulness of joy." The cross and shame first; then the joy at the right hand of God on the throne. How contrary is all this to the idea of pain and sorrow perpetuated in His exalted state. Paul sets forth the same order. Christ descended to the death of the cross. "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 8-11). Having risen, "death hath no more dominion over Him."

The coming change from deep humiliation to the summit of blessedness was powerfully present to the mind of Jesus. The thought pervades His prayer of consecration: "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son . . . with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." He was about to re-enter it with the new nature He had assumed, to be followed by His disciples;

“that they may behold My glory.” “The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified” (John xii. 23). This explains His words to those who sorrowed at the thought of His leaving them, bidding them rejoice because He was about to pass from His state of trouble into that wherein He would be as absolutely free from suffering as His Father. “For,” in that respect at present, He tells them, “My Father is greater than I” (John x. 29).

Not without scriptural warrant, therefore, do theologians assert that at the ascension, “every humiliating restriction and limitation of His mortal nature was indeed for ever at an end.”* “No agitation ruffles the breast of the enthroned Mediator.”† Christ is now exalted, and prays, “not with strong crying and tears, but in the sovereignty and prevailing power of one who has achieved eternal redemption for His people.” “The keynote of the Christian life as it related to the ascended Christ is one of victory and triumph.”‡ “The ascension marks the stage of the absolute consummation of the humanity, where, in eternal union with Him, it has become henceforth, in its glorified and pneumatic form,

* Maclear, *Creed*, p. 169.

† Williams, *Manual of Theology*, p. 168.

‡ Denney, *Studies*, pp. 166-170.

the adequate organ of God as the Son. Jesus is now set free from all earthly burden, all narrowing force of matter, from every, even physical, imperfection." *

8. *Nearness to us.*—It is assumed that the idea of the enthroned Christ enduring pain brings Him nearer to us suffering mortals, rendering our fellowship with Him closer, and our comfort in Him greater. But if He be helpful and precious to us in proportion as He approximates to what we are, *in all respects*, then the Christ of the Arian, or the Socinian, would be more advantageous to man than the Christ who is the Father's co-equal; because the former is the more like man, created and limited. He would be still more like man if He had ever been defiled by sin; but would He be as attractive and helpful? For our weal He is sufficiently near if He has our nature, has experienced on earth our sorrow and death for our redemption, and remains ever full of loving regard for our well-being, seeking to save us to the uttermost. If the human heart craves for the human in God, it finds it in Him who, while truly and properly

* Dorner, *Syst. Doc.* iv. 138, 139. In the Westminster Larger Catechism, Quest. 54, we read of Christ exalted: "In that as God-man, He is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fulness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth."

God, is as truly and properly man; and who is all the more sympathetic and helpful because He is "without sin," and is in touch, on the one side, with the deepest needs of man, and, on the other, with the boundless resources of Deity.

The kind of nearness we fallen men need at present is not likeness in either moral or natural evil, but the complete fitness and earnest will of the "strong Son of God" to do for us whatever is best. If nearness means likeness, it is far better for us and Him that, in some respects, He should not be like us—peccable, fallible, feeble, mutable, mortal, hedged round with the often painful limitations of this earthly condition. As God, He is, happily for us, very unlike us, and for that reason all the more able and willing to befriend us.

9. *Hebrews iv.* 15.—"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," is often quoted as proof positive that the glorified God-man is the subject of mental pain, in sympathy with His suffering people on earth. The terms of the passage, carefully examined, do not warrant that view. The exaltation did not make our Lord's human nature infinite, consequently it is inconceivable

that it can enter into the particular sufferings of every disciple, recollecting how many millions they number, and how widely they are spread over the earth. Through the omniscience of the divine, the human may apprehend in some general way the mental condition of all under probation; but the consolation of His sympathy goes beyond that, and encourages every individual sufferer to believe his great High Priest is minutely acquainted with, and consciously interested in, all his experience. This implies that it is not the sympathy of the human nature only, but of the divine-human Person, who is the more fitted to sympathise, because, in His humanity, He has gone through similar adversity. Thus He acquired a human qualification to sympathise with men, which, as God only, He did not possess. "He knows what sore temptations mean, for He hath felt the same," in His human soul. But He no more continues His earthly sufferings in heaven, than He continues the work of atonement there. The one is as needless as the other in His office of intercessor. For expiation of sin, suffering was necessary to success. That achieved, further suffering could contribute no effectiveness to the intercession, which proceeds on the basis of previous suffering on earth.

It is to be observed, that what He is said to sympathise with is not our pain (πάθημα, nor πόνος, nor ὠδὴν, nor βασανισμός), but weaknesses, infirmities, or diseases (ἀσθένεια). "The weaknesses incident to our frail humanity."* But it will hardly be contended that all the weakness or infirmity attaching to His people attaches to Him. His sympathy must mean something other than His actually feeling what they feel.

The tense in this and kindred passages ought not to be overlooked. It is never said, He is *now* suffering after His ascension; but that He is able to sympathise because of what He *has* suffered previously. The language is well adapted to guard against the notion of His present suffering, by keeping to the past tense. He can now sympathise, because He "was in all points tempted." "Rather, 'but one that hath been.'"† "In that He Himself *hath suffered*, being tempted, He *is* able to succour them that *are* tempted" (Heb. ii. 18). When the sympathy of the Aaronic priest is spoken of, it is said, he "*is* compassed with infirmity." But when the risen Christ is the subject, His infirmities and painful struggles are placed before the ascension. "Who *in the days of His flesh*, having offered up prayers

* Dr. Kay, *Speaker's Commentary*.

† *Ibid.* and R. V.

and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and having been heard for His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. v. 7-9). No mention is made of His suffering after being "made perfect." The words of Jesus guard the same distinction. "Behoved it not the Christ to *suffer* these things, and (having passed them) to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26). There are many expressions to the effect that He "was once offered," "suffered," "bore our sins," "gave Himself," but not one to the effect that He suffers now; which confirms the truth that His human nature is beyond the reach of suffering, and His divine incapable of it.

10. *Glorified Saints*.—As with Christ so with His glorified saints. Respecting them, the impression we take from the Scriptures is, that their happiness is unmingled with suffering. While on earth their hopes were for entrance into the presence of their Lord (Tit. ii. 12-13). They expected to be presented perfect in Him (Col. i. 28). Where, in the Scriptures, could a description of heaven be found corresponding to the following by Dr. G. Matheson? The "unprepared inhabitant" "had looked for the death of care, and he sees care deepened . . . behold!

every man is bearing some load, every heart waiting for the summons, 'Enter ye into the pain of your Lord.' " *

The teaching of St. Peter regards suffering as an earthly evil that would be out of place in heaven, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy. If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed (μακάριοι) are ye; because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you." † Clearly happiness or rejoicing, as the opposite of "sufferings" or "reproach," is a legitimate *end* to be desired and pursued; and suffering is an evil not desirable *per se*; but which may have to be temporarily endured for the sake of that end—happiness. It is also clear that happiness, however closely conjoined with suffering, is distinct from it, and of opposite nature. The rejoicing is not identical with the "sufferings," but in their midst; the happiness is not identical with the pain of reproach, but exists in spite of it, through the sufferer's relation to Christ.

* *Words by the Wayside*, p. 48.

† 1 Pet. iv. 12-14.

Moreover, there is a contrast between the present mixture of happiness and suffering, and the unmixed happiness of the future state—now, rejoicing and blessedness associated with “fiery trial,” “sufferings,” and “reproach”; in the future, when suffering has answered its disciplinary purpose and salvation is complete, “exceeding joy, at the revelation of His glory.”

There are those who presume to dictate the character of any God or heaven which they would deign to accept. Some will have no God unless His manner of existence corresponds to what they prefer in fellow-men, and no heaven unless it be after the pattern of what they deem suitable to this mundane state of things. Alas, how one-sided and short-sighted human minds may become! What a mercy they are not taken at their word. But how can either God or heaven be conformed to the diverse models thus set up? In this way some betray a prejudice against a God or a heaven of unadulterated happiness. As Jesus taught that the conjugal relations of this world will not hold in that which is to come, it is reasonable to suppose the associations of pain with love, so common in this lapsed condition, will form no part of the experience inherited by celestial saints, or their

all-glorious King. Glorified saints, perfectly happy in a still-suffering Redeemer, or sharing His pain; children of God in their heavenly estate, completely happy in the presence of their partially happy Father, or participating in His grief, are ideas as repugnant to reason as they are alien to the Word of Truth.

Surely the Christian's hope of pure blessedness is not a dream born of desire and imagination. He is often, like Paul, "in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better" (Phil. i. 21-23). His future is one in which "there shall be no curse any more," and "no night" (Rev. xxii. 3-4); and God shall "wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more" (Rev. xxi. 4). "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh abomination, and a lie" (Rev. xxi. 27). The inhabitants of that city reign with Christ. However great their sorrows and toils on earth, of their state hereafter we read, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. xiv. 13). They, while here, know their brief affliction "worketh for them more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17). On quitting this mortal sphere, they join "the spirits

of just men made perfect." "Every occasion of sorrow is removed. The former things are passed away." * "They have all their sufferings past."

No pain the inhabitants feel;
No sickness or sorrow shall prove.

The bliss unmixed, the glorious prize,
They find with Christ in paradise.

But this perfect bliss they expect to enjoy in close association with Christ, from the moment they leave this world. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The marriage supper awaiting them is "of the Lamb," and symbolises their future delight in company with Him (Rev. xix.). Their enthronement will be at His side; their reward to share His joy. They will be His brethren, and joint inheritors. He will be the light of their city. His throne shall be in their midst, and they shall see His face (Rev. xxii. 4).

But can the saints enjoy such reward, while their Lord in their midst is bearing a tremendous load of grief? If in their vital union with Him, their happiness is from Him, in Him, and to Him, how can it be unalloyed so long as they know He is racked with care and anguish? Can He be the object of their yearning pity, and

* Rev. Thos. Jackson, *Expos. Discourses*, p. 35.

at the same time of their intense, unmixed delight? The argument that Christ must be miserable while, and because, His people on earth are so, would also prove that glorified saints could not be perfectly happy while their Lord and Saviour was a pitiable sufferer. Moreover, the Christian mind recoils from the idea that saints are free from natural evil while the fountain of their life and joy is not.

The happiness of heaven may rest on conditions in many respects widely different from those of earthly enjoyment. Here the enjoyment of rest presupposes endurance of previous toil; the pleasure of eating and drinking, previous hunger and thirst; the agreeable consciousness of regaining health and strength, previous illness; the sweetness of friendship is often dependent on the previous pain of being hated despised ignored or neglected. It is hard to believe such previous unhappy experience can be necessary to enjoyment of heaven's delights.

The exemption of saints in heaven from all suffering shows that they may be exalted above all unhappiness, and yet attain moral excellence far surpassing all they realised in their mortal state. And if their perfection of moral character is in no way impaired by their exemption from

suffering, how much more may the Son of God be perfect in all moral qualities without enduring natural evil. Suffering would be no enhancement of His moral perfection; but a serious deterioration of His glory.

VII

SYMPATHY

IT is apparently taken for granted that nothing in heaven or earth deserves the name of sympathy which differs in its composition or concomitants from ours. Consequently it is assumed that all elements present in the sympathy of mortal man with the suffering are essential to the sympathy of God, and Christ, and celestial saints.

Analysing human sympathy with suffering on earth, we find it consists of ingredients some of which are moral and praiseworthy, and others non-moral, and neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. There is *imagination* by which one thinks of himself as if he were in the suffering condition of another. There is more or less of mental *pain* akin to that of the sufferer, and tending to rouse the sympathiser to *action* in the sufferer's behalf in order to relieve himself of pain. There is *benevolence*, or love, concerned for

the sufferer's relief or deliverance, and readily yielding to act on the promptings of pain.

The benevolence is moral and praiseworthy; the pain and its tendency to relieve itself by removing the pain in others is in itself non-moral, and in its motive may be concerned for others only for the sake of self. Whether non-moral or selfish, this element does not in the least make the sympathy virtuous. It would be none the less virtuous were all the other elements present and the pain absent. The philanthropic surgeon, who, after long experience of doing good, continues to do it without the acute sensibility of pain which at first afflicted him, may be even more benevolent towards his patients than when he began practice.* The devoted Christian minister, after years of experience in winning souls from death to life, may be less acutely conscious of pain over their miseries than in earlier years, and yet more benevolent, skilful, and successful. Nay, where the sensibility of sympathetic pain is most keen, there may be little disinterested love; and where the pain is less pungent, there may be the most pure, real, and helpful benevolence. This appears to be Dr. Abercrombie's meaning when he says,

* The writer had penned this illustration before he saw it in Dr. Matheson's book, see p. 145, *infra*.

"Our sympathy can never be supposed to constitute an action right or wrong." * Alluding to Sterne's writings, Robert Hall remarks, "Sensibility should never be confounded with benevolence, since it constitutes at best rather the ornament of a fine, than the virtue of a good, mind. A good man may have nothing of it; a bad man may have it in abundance." † While pain of mind, in some degree, seems to be mostly, if not invariably, an element of sympathy in earthly man, it is conceivable that under altogether different conditions, and in a totally different world, sympathy may be quite as virtuous and valuable without the pain.

Notwithstanding the close intermingling of pain with human pity, at least in our present state of trial, painless pity of the finest order is by no means inconceivable; that is, love taking the form of pity to a person in suffering danger or need of help. It deprecates the evil of its object, and if the nature of the case permit, tends to mitigate or remove it. As God's anger is not the fiery impulse which the word often symbolises when applied to man, so His pity is not in all respects precisely the same as man's

* See Adam Smith's *Moral Sentiments*, p. 58; and Gladstone's *Butler's Sermons*, p. 110.

† *Works*, i. 118.

pity. Pity is a mode of love; but pain misery or unhappiness is not. Pain is not of the same nature quality or kind as love. Nor is the one evolved out of the other, as accidental properties of a substance are forms of essential, *e.g.* faithfulness of righteousness, and mercy of benevolence. Pity is not a form of suffering, nor suffering a form of pity, though they be associated intimately. Pity is a particular form of goodwill or benevolence, and is not dependent for its existence on the suffering of its subject. Either pity or suffering may exist apart from the other.

We must not be misled by terminology applied to the divine which is necessarily borrowed from the human. Because such words as patience, sympathy, compassion, etymologically and as originally applied to man, carried notions of suffering, it does not follow that they must carry the same notions when applied to God. Words change their import by usage and custom, and especially by transfer to an entirely different order of subjects. Hence there may be sense without sensation, spirit without reference to the atmosphere, marriage of God to Israel without some of the conjugal relationships attaching to marriages among men on earth; and so there may be patience and sympathy in God without pain,

compassion without passion, long-suffering without suffering. God is present with the humble and contrite to revive them, but not to be Himself either humble or contrite; to bind up the broken-hearted, but not to be Himself broken-hearted (Isa. lvii. 15, and lxi. 1).

A proof that pain is not indispensable to the very being of sympathy is afforded by the fact that, notwithstanding the etymological meaning of the word, painless sympathy with gladness or happiness is as really sympathy as when it includes pain. One may as truly enter into another's joy as his sorrow. A good man or angel may sympathise with God in His design to extend the saving knowledge of Christ, and His triumph over the forces of evil, without pain on either side. Similarly, God may sympathise with man's benevolent desires for the same ends, without any touch of pain.

Again, sympathy is said to take on another's suffering by a process of imagination, in which the sympathiser so far conceives himself to be in the sufferer's state that he takes on his unhappy feeling.* That imagination plays its part in our sympathy is evident, if we recollect how possible it is for one to feel acutely for persons in supposed suffering who are afterwards found not

* Bain, *Mental and Moral Science*, pp. 244-276.

to have suffered at all, *e.g.* on hearing a false report of a friend overtaken by calamity. So long as the false report is believed to be true the sympathy is the same as if it were true. But the process of imagination is non-moral, deserving neither praise nor blame, except so far as the will controls the attention and imagination and directs them to their objects. But such act of the will is distinct from the imagination, and outside the composition of sympathy. The act of imagination in itself is neither a virtue nor a vice. If all the other ingredients of sympathy remained, it would be neither better nor worse morally, though the imagination were wanting.

In the case of mortal man, imagination serves as a means of exciting the sympathetic disposition to help the suffering. But we have no reason to infer thence, that in other moral intelligences, especially in God, the same means are needful, or even possible. Such dependence on imagination as belongs to man appears inapplicable to the Omniscient, to whom everything is known just as it is. It is unthinkable that He arrives at a due appreciation of the needs of a case by a process of imagination. To imagine oneself in the very different case of another is a kind of self-deception, well enough for us, but

improper to the infinite Being. And yet God's sympathy with suffering man without the aid of imagination is quite as real, and far more helpful, than ours with that aid. "Sympathy is to enter into the feelings of another, to act vicariously under the motive power of those pleasures and pains, and to act them out as if they were our own."* But this, while true of mortal men, would not define the sympathy of the perfect God. The element of pain in human sympathy seems to incite to action on lines dictated by benevolence; but God needs no such incitement.

Some think it essential to sympathy that its subject shall have gone through the suffering experienced by its object. But this is more than doubtful. It cannot be contended that the self-existent Being has gone through the pains of all the men with whom He sympathises. Many sympathise with the famine-stricken, who never feel the misery of starvation; many with the victims of slavery, who have known nothing but freedom; many with the diseased, who have always enjoyed robust health; many with criminals, who never came under the penal stroke of law.

It is true that to have suffered in some way, may give a special, but not the only qualification

* Bain, p. 277.

for sympathising with the suffering. It is thus that in His unmixed blessedness our High Priest is the more qualified to sympathise with His suffering followers by His similar experience in the past. He knows by the memory of His own experience on earth what our sorrows temptations and trials are.

The indispensable moral element of virtuous sympathy, whether human or divine, is *benevolence*, the disposition to seek the happiness of others, and to enjoy its object by possession or experience of, or intercourse with it, according to the nature of the case. This element wanting, the sympathy is not rational and moral, but only the animal affection from which the brute instinctively takes care of its young, or allies itself to others of the same species. Pain and imagination are fitting ingredients of our sympathy with suffering in this world, benevolence is its vital and permanent principle. The former it may shed on entering the new conditions of eternity, just as the conjugal relationships so natural in the present state shall cease on our attaining the world where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, and yet will love each other and their God more purely ardently persistently and blissfully than was possible in this world.

It is evident the spurs and stimulants of imagination and pain are needful to men under their present probation in order to counteract their tendency to indifference and inertness in relation to the needs of others, to help out their feeble, and often doubtful kindness, and to incite them to vigorous effort on behalf of the needy. It is, on the other hand, not evident, but highly improbable that any such incitements will be required to stimulate the benevolent feeling of spirits no longer clogged with the hindrances of this present state of being. And we have good reason to feel certain such incentives are as needless as they would be derogatory in Him who is "Spirit" and "Light" and "Love," and in the divine-human Christ who reigns as "The King of Glory." "The compassion of God is like a father's in all that is tender, strong, and full, but not in scope and power." * It may be truly added, not like it in suffering; and as with His compassion, so with His sympathy.

In various respects what is deemed natural to human sympathy cannot belong to the divine; *e.g.* with us it "supposes (1) one's own remembered experience of pleasure and pain." Divine sympathy needs no such remembrance; "and (2) a connection in the mind between the out-

* H. W. Beecher, *Treasury of Religious Thought*, iv. 68.

ward signs or expression of the various feelings and the feelings themselves," as sorrow expressed by tears, and pleasure by laughter. But God's sympathy is surely independent of these signs. With us sympathy is often a kind of *imitation* of the feelings of others and their modes of manifestation, and so is infectious, as "the sound of clearing the throat, the yawn, laughter, sobbing,"* all which are inapplicable to God. As these elements are but the accidents of sympathy, appropriate enough in its human and mundane conditions, but not necessary to its existence under all conditions, they furnish no proof that they are present in divine sympathy. Accordingly the pain so often present in human sympathy may be utterly absent from the divine.

It is as easy to think of all that is pure, beneficent, and morally excellent in human sympathy, holding perfectly in the divine, as it is difficult to think of the weaknesses and defects, moral or physical, which are incident, or temporarily necessary, to the sympathy of earthly man, as having any place whatever in the divine.†

* Bain, p. 277, 278.

† "Joy, grief, anger, sympathy, and pity must be by no means divested of all that is anthropomorphic . . . only what is impure or weak is to be rejected" (Dorner, *Syst. Doc.* i. 463-465).

Adam Smith says, "Sympathy, however, enlivens joy and alleviates grief." * This is true; but if it were possible to eliminate the element of pain from sympathy and retain all the rest, might it not have the same effect? At any rate it is inconceivable that the sympathy of God could be rendered more intrinsically excellent, or more effectual for its purpose, by the addition of pain to the enlightened, free, tender, infinite love which bends intently over the sufferer and is ready to impart all possible help.

It is said the sufferer is relieved to find his fellow-man in sympathy with him. But surely if the sufferer's moral character be good, he is not pleased with the sight of pain in another, except as it is the effect and proof of the love which cares for him. Were it possible to be equally assured of the love without the sign of it in pain, the sufferer would equally appreciate, and be relieved by it. To a right-minded sufferer, the comfort and strength derived from assurance of God's pure, tender, personal, helpful love are not less because the love is unmixed with pain. The help would not be greater or more precious were he also assured that pain was in the love. The addition could not make God more willing to succour and save, though it might excite our

* *Moral Sentiments*, p. 17.

pity for His humiliation. He does not sympathise less truly or deeply with His children in the throes of natural death because He is incapable of enduring the pangs of dissolution; and if He can sympathise with the sufferings of death without enduring them Himself, why may He not as truly sympathise with men in their other sufferings without undergoing them Himself, or any imagination of them in His own nature?

How would the element of pain in God's mercy to men under trouble be an advantage to them? If they were rebels against His authority, it would not increase His will or power to render practical help. It could not make the love that waits to forgive and restore more real or more abundant. What they, like His tried and afflicted children, need to see in Him is not pain, but strength wisdom holiness loving-kindness.

A sufferer may find some consolation in the thought that he is not the only sufferer, as it reminds him that he is not the victim of blind fate or chance, but probably, in common with others, subject to some wise and righteous law of suffering; that others better understand his case because of their own suffering, and are therefore more inclined to care for him. But these are considerations appropriate to human

fellow-sufferers; not to a suffering Creator. Suffering could not improve His help, or our appreciation of it. In tribulation we pray for the exercise and manifestation of His sympathy towards us; never that He may suffer over our case; nor does it occur to us that we should benefit if He did. We never dream of rejoicing with praise and thanksgiving in His sufferings. Christ sets forth the greatness of the Father in power knowledge wisdom justice love; never in the pain He endures. He rather contrasts the Father's freedom from all suffering with His own lot during His humiliation (John xiv. 28).

Let it not be supposed, however, that to deny the passibility of God is to divest Him of all positive qualities corresponding to the best elements of human sympathy, and fitly bearing the same name; or that they are impaired in the slightest degree. Leaving out all suffering, and whatever implies weakness or imperfection, nothing is more actual and positive in Him than love springing from the depths of the Godhead, and unfolding itself with surpassing beauty, in numberless aspects of mercy compassion pity complacency patience forbearance and wondrous deeds of blessing—a love which fastens on His trusting servant with intense delight, rejoicing in the happiness of the creature, promoting sustain-

ing guarding him with fatherly care, as if the creature's happiness were His own; a love manifesting itself to man by close personal communion, His Spirit imparting to the dead soul the peculiar knowledge of Himself and of His Son, which is life eternal. No sympathy richer than this is conceivable. Where pain is omitted from our conception of His sympathy, there remains a love which pursues the wayward in the form of earnest pity, proving its desire to win him to life by the use of restraints, entreaties, long-suffering, powerful drawings, warnings, overtures of forgiveness, providences, and every force consistent with his personal freedom and responsibility. God is impassible, but not unfeeling; above all weakness and imperfection, but not icy intellect incapable of profound concern for the happiness of His creatures. He is afar off, but as truly nigh at hand; a King enthroned above all height, yet a Father that pitieth His children; the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy; yet present with the humble and contrite heart to revive it. A mother's tenderness to her afflicted child, a father's yearning for his prodigal son, a brother's self-sacrificing longing for his distressed kin, Jonathan's affection for David, all are stony hardness compared with the purity depth and

tenderness of love which draws God's heart to man in grief or pain or peril.

If sympathy with the suffering means thought and benevolence concentrated upon him, the bending down of pity, intense concern to succour sustain relieve or deliver the child of adversity, compassion intent on doing all that is possible for the well-being of its needy object, the greatest of all sympathisers is the ever blessed God. If the sympathy is more appreciable and precious to the sufferer when the subject has known by experience the meaning of suffering, then the most effectual is that of the Son of God who "hath suffered being tempted," who, out of His mercy, bowed Himself to unparalleled agony and death, and then ascended far above all evil to plead the cause of lost and redeemed humanity. But all that is perfectly consistent with the present absolute freedom of the divine sympathiser from suffering. Entering thus into our sorrow, He is none the less "over all God blessed for ever." His sympathy would not be stronger, more effectual, or of greater worth to us by any intermixture of pain. For man, struggling in weakness and grief, there is no sympathy so rich, so free from inferior motives, so keenly alive to the need, so powerful and ready to help, so patient and gentle, as that of the impassible

God; yet it is not miserable sympathy, but the practical compassion of infinite wisdom and love.

Divine sympathy is not an imitation of human. The human is, at best, an imperfect imitation of the divine. The divine is like the human in all that is good; and unlike it in all that is weak, pitiable, or evil. The human may require aids and stimulants, which would be as improper to the divine as they would be superfluous. To avoid error and confusion, we have to do with divine sympathy as we have with divine "jealousy"—to dissociate the human imperfections. As the jealousy is His just and resolute concern to receive the love and honour due to Him as God without the vindictive suspicion generally present in man's jealousy, so divine sympathy with the suffering is infinite love tending to bless, without the unhappiness which associates itself with the sympathy of fallen man.

There is a sense in which God may be said to bear our sorrows. A strong man may benevolently take on his shoulders the burden of a weaker person, who staggers beneath its weight; and yet the benefactor carries it without the slightest strain or inconvenience, and even with pleasure in the agreeable exercise of his strength. His feeling is one of happiness in relieving the

oppressed without in the least oppressing himself. Often a man knows that by speaking a word he can immediately remove the anxiety which troubles the mind of his friend, and in speaking it he does not experience trouble himself, but happiness only; the pleasure of making another happy without thereby making himself miserable. Such benefactors may be said to take on the troubles of others without suffering by the process. In some such sense, though there is a much higher sense attaching to the statement, when Jesus benevolently healed the sick, it was recorded, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. viii. 17), yet he did not Himself endure the sicknesses. So God, looking on the sorrows of His people with strong paternal kindness and great power, removes them in whole or in part, and in that way bears them, though they do not cause sorrow in Him. He undertakes for the weak, the perplexed, the distressed, and upholds or delivers them; but does not become weak, perplexed, or distressed Himself. The careworn cast their care upon Him (1 Pet. v. 7); but He does not become careworn.

Songs composed by devout Christians are no authority on this or any other doctrine; but they may reflect and propagate the true or the

false. The words of Dr. Watts, "And though exalted, feels afresh what every member bears," can only be accepted in a sense consistent with the essential impassibility of the divine in Christ; and with the pure blessedness of His glorified humanity. How may He "feel" our pains? Certainly not as He felt them on earth, nor as we feel them. But while not feeling the *pain* of sympathy as mortals do, He may feel the *benevolence* of sympathy, which is far more important for us, the love which glows with intensity of interest towards us, with tenderest pity, with far-reaching compassion; delighting to pour into the troubled soul consolation peace patience fortitude light strength or hope, according to the need. Could any sympathy be more opportune, effectual, or gracious?

We shrink from hymns, however devout, which seem to crowd heaven with the ills of earth. We have no right to assert—

There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven (Faber),

unless we may attach a meaning to the word "felt" other than to suffer the sorrows.

In the sense that our pains "belong" to our enthroned Lord, only in so far as, without actually suffering them in Himself, He mercifully

sustains us under, and seeks to deliver us from them, can we sing—

To Thee our full humanity
Its joys and pains belong ;
The wrong of man to man, on Thee
Inflicts a deeper wrong (Whittier).

The following better hits the mark :—

O Holy Saviour, Friend unseen,
The faint, the weak, on Thee may lean (Elliott).

Or this true contrast between the Redeemer's
two estates—

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now (Kelly).

Wesley's are almost the very words of Scripture—

God over all for ever blest.

When under crushing affliction, we cast about for a deliverer, it would be but a partial satisfaction to learn that the most loving and willing helper was Himself afflicted, and unable to find perfect happiness so long as His creatures willed to sin. This relief, so far from "answering all the doubts that arise at the sight of human suffering," * increases them, encouraging the fear that no satisfactory solution can be found.

* R. Heath, *Contemp. Review*, Sept. 1899.

Anxious doubts and racking perplexities remain concerning apparent flaws in the perfection of God, and in the state of glorified saints; concerning the moral government of God, concerning a way of escape for man from suffering, and how and why it should first arise, and ever since weigh as an incubus on the whole race, often heaviest on the righteous and lightest on the wicked. If this be our best theodicy, we are badly off indeed.

Far more helpful is the assurance that while our suffering as a species came as the penalty of our sins, and is wisely and graciously utilised as discipline, deliverance is sure, through the vicarious suffering of the incarnate Son, to all who will accept it on the appointed terms; that our Deliverer is unhampered by afflictions in His own nature, and able and willing to make us partakers of His spotless holiness and unmixed joy. All we need in Him of power wisdom righteousness love and bliss He has in fullest perfection. But of that we could not be more firmly confident, did we believe Him the subject of pain sorrow or distress.

VIII

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

1. **O**UR mental habits often lead to our transferring to God qualities and states which are as improper to Him as they are proper to man. The two having some qualities in common, though very unequally, others belonging only to the human are easily assumed to belong also to the divine. God is regarded as a great Father, in whom the attributes of an earthly father inhere in an immeasurably higher degree. Because the analogy holds in some respects, it is, without much consideration, taken for granted that it holds in all, or in some, which examination proves inappropriate to the Deity. Not altogether devoid of truth is the suggestion attributed to an ancient poet (Xenophanes) that if the lions could have pictured a god, he would have been after the likeness of a lion; if the horses, he would have been like a horse; if the oxen, he would have been like an ox. The suggestion is

that on the same principle men fashion their gods after their own likeness. This would be a caricature of Christian theism. But do not some Christian minds too readily ascribe things to God because they are natural to man? God is thought of as if He and man had all the same attributes, though in widely different degrees, *e.g.* as to knowledge, it is assumed that with God as with us it is acquired and accumulated by experience, observation, reflection, reasoning, and other means; whereas, being infinite and necessary to Him, it admits of neither increase nor decrease. Again, He is conceived of as, like man, located and moving from place to place; whereas He is omnipresent. Again, because in a man there can be but one person, it is assumed it must be so in God.

Similarly, because man is so affected, it is held that God is subject to surprise, agitation, revulsion of feeling, grief, disappointment, anguish, on the occurrence of such events as produce these states in the minds of men; whereas men are so affected because of limitations imperfections and conditions from which God is absolutely free. In some cases no practical harm results from speaking of God on these assumptions, so long as it is understood to be only a figurative representation, and the likeness apparent, not

real. Without some such understanding we are likely to be landed in confusion, error, and perplexity, with regard to Him of whom it is of the highest importance that we form accurate conceptions. Failing this understanding, we may be reduced to the level of thinking God a very superior kind of man, forgetting that between Him and ourselves there is the difference between the infinite and the finite, the self-existent and the dependent, the immutable and the mutable, the perfect and the imperfect, the Creator and the creature.

2. Against this pregnant error of reducing the divine to the level of the human we are warned by God's own emphatic insistence on the essential difference: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. lv. 8, 9). "To whom, then, will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" "To whom, then, will ye liken Me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One . . . there is no searching of His understanding" (Isa. xl. 18-25). "O Lord, how great are Thy works, and Thy thoughts are very deep" (Ps. xcii. 5). "To whom will ye liken Me, and make

Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be like? . . . I am God, and there is none like Me" (Isa. xlv. 5-9). That God is so pitiful and helpful to wrong-doers, and so faithful to His word, is because He is not like man. "I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee" (Hos. xi. 9). "I am the Lord, I change not; *therefore* ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. iii. 6). "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself" (Ps. l. 21). Bishop Butler, supposing his argument objected to on the ground that nothing weak or imperfect can belong to God, admits the difference, and in the words already quoted, answers, "'Is not passion and affection a weakness, and what a perfect being must be entirely free from.' Perhaps so, but it is mankind I am speaking of—imperfect creatures." Clearly he thought the attributes of God could not be determined by those of man.

3. And yet His word predicates of Him what, strictly speaking, is proper to man, and not to Him. No wonder, if we bear in mind that ideas of the ineffable One had to be conveyed in words appropriate to human and secular affairs; and that the minds of the recipients were darkened

by sin and ignorance, and had to receive spiritual truth on supernatural things by means of symbols drawn from things natural and material. Probably had the same truth been presented in the form of abstract metaphysical or philosophical statement, it would have failed to catch the ear and penetrate the understanding and affections of the average man. Hence the revelation is to a great extent couched in figures of speech. The heavenly is enfolded in the earthly; the divine is spoken in the language of the human; God appears in the aspects of a man, to enable man to apprehend Him. And yet to safeguard our ideas of His perfect divinity against degradation, other parts of the revelation assure us there is, and can be, nothing in God unbecoming the only Being of absolute perfection.

4. The consequence is, that we have representations of God in the Scriptures so opposite in form that a superficial or hasty reader might imagine them contradictory in meaning. For example, God is described as having the body and parts of a man—eyes, ears, hands, face, bowels, back parts; and as seated, walking, descending, rising early; smelling the odour of sacrifice; speaking in human language. At the same time, we are told “God is spirit,” “the Father of spirits,” alone necessarily immortal.

So spiritual indeed is His nature, that His chosen people are forbidden to represent Him to themselves in any sensible form whatsoever.* We read, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. vi. 5); "We have seen God" (Judg. xiii. 22); "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. xxxii. 30). We also read, "There shall no man see Me and live" (Exod. xxxiii. 20); "No man hath seen God at any time" (John i. 18); "Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape" (John v. 37); He is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible," "whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. i. 17, and vi. 16). It is said His people made Him serve with their sins (Isa. xliii. 2-4), and yet He reigns over all, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Jeremiah says the Lord deceived him (Jer. xx. 7). And in Ezekiel we read, "I the Lord have deceived that prophet" (Ezek. xiv. 9). At the same time, it is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. vi. 18). He is "the God of truth" (Jer. x. 10), "which keepeth truth for ever" (Ps. cxlvi. 6). "It repented the Lord that He had made man on earth" (Gen. vi. 6), and that He had made Saul king (1 Sam. xv. 11). But it is also recorded, "The strength of Israel will

* Exod. xx. 4-6; Deut. iv. 15-24, v. 8, and xxvii. 15; Lev. xxvi. 1.

not lie nor repent; for He is not a man that He should repent" (1 Sam. xv. 29; Num. xxiii. 19).

God is said to have been grieved at His heart (Gen. vi. 6); and often proved and grieved (Ps. lxxviii. 10; Heb. iii. 17; Eph. iv. 30): while He is "the blessed, and only potentate," "the blessed God," "over all, God blessed for ever." He was weary and troubled with insincere offerings, and with sins (Isa. i. 13, 14, and xlii. 24; Mal. ii. 17); and "weary with repenting" (Jer. xv. 6). Yet He "the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. xl. 28). He says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is Mine and the fulness thereof" (Ps. l. 12). In His presence is "fulness of joy"; at His right hand "pleasures for evermore" (Ps. xvi. 11). He is "glorious in holiness" (Exod. xv. 11). "The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. vi. 3). He is "robbed" (Mal. iii. 8); and asks "where is mine honour?" (Mal. i. 6). Yet He is "a jealous God," and His glory will He not give to another (Isa. xlii. 8, and xlviii. 11; Josh. xxiv. 19). He "laughs" and "mocks" at His enemies (Ps. ii. 4; Prov. i. 26); yet "holy and reverend is His name" (Ps. cxi. 9).

5. This is no case for rejecting both classes

of statement, after the manner of Kant's antinomies, on the plea that they are mutually contradictory ; but rather for seeking to discover their underlying agreement. Nor is it reasonable to deny both the passibility and the impassibility of God by those who think both are taught. That were to cast away the true with the false ; for of the two statements that God is passible and that He is impassible, one must be true, and the other must be false. But our contention is that the impassibility is a plain truth of Scripture, and the passibility only mistaken for Scripture truth by misinterpretation of certain figurative passages.

If it were not a matter of probable evidence, but of two contradictory propositions both mathematically demonstrated, we might be in Kant's dilemma. It is a case, however, of balancing probabilities. The fact that probable evidence seems to some to warrant opposite conclusions is not a sufficient reason for rejecting both ; but rather for weighing their comparative claims, in order to decide which are the strongest. In the instance before us, we have to inquire which class of descriptions are literal, exact, or scientific, and therefore the ruling class ; and which are the figurative or poetic, and therefore subordinate, whose import must be determined

by the plainer. There can be here no question that the literal are those which attribute to God the highest properties, the most absolute perfection, the most transcendent excellence; and the others are the figurative and rhetorical, to be interpreted in conformity with the sense of the literal.

6. The only adequate explanation is that one class of these descriptions is *anthropomorphic*, the other literal. The former, condescending to human capacities associations and habits of thought, speak of God as if He had the qualities limitations and even weaknesses of man; while the latter keep us well assured it is not so in reality. *Anthropopathy* is that species of anthropomorphism which represents God as if He, like us, were subject to trouble pain grief defeat unrest, or other kind of suffering; while, again, other passages inform us that He is as free from suffering as He is from ignorance or feebleness. Some affections "belong to God *per se*, as they simply contain in themselves perfection; others, which seem to have something of imperfection, are attributed to Him after the manner of the feelings of men, on account of some effects (*ipsius*) which He produces analogous to the effects of the creatures, yet without any passion, as He is simple and immutable; and without

any disorder and repugnance to right reason." *
 "In revealing Himself, God has often used a figure called *anthropopathy*, by which human passions are attributed to the divine mind. The ideas conveyed by those allusions certainly are not the precise and proper ideas of the divine attributes; but rightly understood, and divested of everything which is weak and sinful in man, they suggest the most appropriate ideas of the ways of God which we can conceive." †

"God of His own nature," wrote Bullinger, "doth not repent as men do, so that He should be touched with grief." ‡ God "is not capable of those passions, which are signs of weakness and impotence, or subject to those regrets we are subject to. . . . And a change upon passion is accounted by all so great a weakness, that none can entertain so unworthy a conceit of God. Where He is said to repent, He is also said to grieve (Gen. vi. 6); now no proper grief can be imagined to be in God. As repentance is inconsistent with infallible foresight, so is grief no less inconsistent with undefiled blessedness. God is blessed for ever; and, therefore, nothing can befall Him that can stain that blessedness. His blessedness would be impaired

* Arminius, ii. 350.

† Ed. Hare, *Socinianism*, p. 255.

‡ Vol. iv. p. 56.

and interrupted while He is repenting." "Those human ways of speaking (of Himself) ought to be understood in a manner agreeable to the infinite excellency and majesty of God, and are only designed to mark out something in God which hath a resemblance with something in us," "or else we may understand those expressions of joy and grief and repentance are of that nature, that if God were capable of our passions, He would discover Himself in such cases as we do; and when the prophets mention the joys and applaudings of heaven, earth, and the sea, they only signify that the things they speak of are so good that if the heavens and the sea had natures capable of joy, they would express it upon that occasion in such manner as we do. So would God have joy at the obedience of men, and grief at the unworthy carriage of men, and repent of His kindness when men abuse it, and repent of His punishment when men reform under His rod, were the majesty of His nature capable of such affections." *

✓ Dr. Thomas Jackson, President of Corpus Christi and Dean of Peterborough, more than two centuries ago, wrote, "No affection or operation that essentially includes imperfection can

* Charnock, i. 138, 225, 226, 255, 256; so Calvin, *Inst.* i. 147-264.

properly be attributed to perfection itself ; but if the imperfection be only accidental, that is, such as may be severed from the affection, the affection, after such separation made, may, without metaphor (in some schoolmen's judgment) be ascribed to God." * That is, if any human affection, as sympathy, compassion, patience, repentance, or anger, be ascribed to God, it must be only those elements of it which are consistent with His absolute perfection, *e.g.* His repentance can include no discovery of error in His past action, and no acknowledgment of unwisdom. His vengeance can include no cruel vindictiveness, His sympathy no pain, His patience no mental uneasiness.

The meaning of this is that, while it is fitting, and perhaps necessary, for God's word to speak of Him as if He were human ; yet, in order that we may think of Him with strict accuracy and precision apart from all figures of speech, we have to eliminate from our conception of Him, all that is weak, faulty, or imperfect, as pain grief impotence deterioration ignorance and suffering of every kind ; and retain only ideas of what is worthy of infinite excellence. "There can be no perturbed emotion in Him ; but this arises not, if I may so say, from less sensibility,

* *Works*, v. 200 ; vi. 91 ; viii. 300.

but from His higher and absolute perfection . . . He is the ever happy God." * A somewhat similar process of elimination takes place with the figure of speech called "personification." If one speaks of "the smiling morn," "the angry sea," or "the fierce winds," it is taken as a poetic or rhetorical representation of movements in inanimate things, which, in intelligent beings, would spring from feelings described by those adjectives. So when God is said to repent, mourn, or suffer, it denotes a relationship, attitude, or action which, in men, would be the effect of repentance, sorrow, or suffering.

7. But we must not pass from one extreme to another, gliding into the notion that after separating what is merely human from our ideas of God, the remaining conception is in any way inferior to our previous estimate of His greatness. Our estimate should become really finer, worthier, and more fitted to evoke our admiration and praise, and to inspire our grateful confidence.

✓ With fallen man suffering is so often and so intimately connected with goodwill and kindness of disposition as its immediate motive or accompaniment, that, by an easy process of mental association, we identify it with them ;

* John Ely, *Posthumous Works*, p. 31.

and it thus comes to share our admiration of benevolence, as if the suffering also were itself of praiseworthy moral quality. A mother, for example, spends nights and days in painful effort nursing her sick child. Her loss of rest, exhaustion, and contraction of the patient's disease, because they are the effects and signs of the love working at her heart, excite appreciation and praise, as if they were one in nature with the love; while in truth, but for the associated love and the attainment of its end, they might pass without exciting either admiration or approval, and might perhaps be deprecated as mere misfortune or natural evil.

Strictly speaking, the quality which wins our moral approbation is not the mental or physical suffering; but the love with which it is so inextricably associated. If we could have—what is perhaps impossible in this lapsed, disciplinary state—the same plenteous benevolence, with all its beneficent effects without any of the weakness or suffering, we should have the pure gold without a particle of dross, the diamond without a flaw. Now that is just what we have in God, whose deepest compassion is as entirely free from natural as from moral evil. In the light of this distinction, it is as true as ever that His people are “the apple of His eye”; that He is

“very pitiful, and of tender mercy,” “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy,” “He delighteth in mercy,” is “rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.” A prince’s help for the needy is not less real or precious because it does not impoverish him. Rescue from a deadly illness is not less welcome because the doctor effecting it does not himself contract the disease. Nor is God less rich or tender in His mercy because its exercise towards the needy does not transfer the need to Him.

The love of God, minus all suffering, whether it take the form of complacency or pity, remains as excellent and abundant as ever. Its regard for our happiness, its beneficent effects, its interest in our sorrows and struggles, its compassion for us in our wilful follies and self-caused miseries, its delight in our well-being and well-doing, are as genuine and valuable to us as if they were associated with signs of divine pain; and more so. To eliminate from our conception of God all ideas of suffering is not to think of Him as a frigid unsympathetic ruler of perfect power intelligence and justice, but indifferent to the happiness or misery of His sentient creatures, and incapable of enjoying our blessedness. As He is pleased with all the works of His hands according to the nature He has

given them, His interest in man and regard for his happiness is great in proportion to the higher endowments of intelligence sensitivity immortality and God-like moral freedom with which He has constituted him. Using the word in the sense of loving or not loving, approving or disapproving, delighting or not delighting in an object, God is a Being of pure and perfect *feeling*, out of which He cares for us as no other being can. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity them that fear Him"; but His pity surpasses that of all human fathers as much in its freedom from the defilement of pain as in its purity and depth.

The ascriptions which, when applied to mortal man, imply some mixture of imperfection, are far from meaningless when, minus the imperfection, they are applied to God. His anger, wrath, fury, indignation, do not signify uneasy or disconcerted agitation, mental perturbation, tumultuous passion, distress, or detriment, as they do in us; but just disapprobation, condemnation, displacency, or a will to punish. His hatred of wrong-doing is not a mechanical, perfunctory, unfelt opposition; but one of personal, though not miserable repugnance. It is not for us to speculate on how much more than we can know may lie hidden behind the words em-

ployed to indicate His attitude towards evil-doers. Enough is intelligible to show that the ascriptions are neither devoid of profound meaning, nor cast the least shadow over His unmixed happiness. He is incapable of all unhappy passion ; but not of the active benevolence which stoops to raise the fallen, to succour the faint, to shield the tempted, to forgive the penitent, to smile on the good and happy, and to make the welfare of man a chief end of His thought and action. His compassion is, not as the derivation of the word might suggest, the literal endurance of its object's suffering, but the condescending, sympathetic love which aims at removing or reducing our ills. He need not be weak in order to help us in weakness, or in pain in order to relieve our pain, or troubled with passion in order to calm our passionate grief. And yet to speak of Him as if He suffered like ourselves may aid us in our attempts to apprehend the intensity of His love, while other representations guard us against mistaking anthropomorphic for literal descriptions of His real and inmost state.

“ When He exhorts, obtests, entreats, beseeches that we would obey and live ; speaks as if He were grieved . . . these are merciful condescensions, and the efforts of that goodness

which chooseth the fittest ways of moving us, rather than that He is moved Himself, by any such passions as we are wont to feel in ourselves He speaks sometimes as if He did suffer somewhat human, as an apt means . . . to bring us to enjoy at length what is truly divine. We may . . . understand these to be His gracious insinuations: whereby, as He hath not left the matter liable to be so misunderstood, as if He were really affected with solicitude, or any perturbation concerning us (which He hath sufficiently given us to understand His blessed nature cannot admit of), so, nor can they be thought disguises of Himself, or misrepresentations that have nothing in Him corresponding thereto." "When expressions that import anger or grief are used, even concerning God Himself, we must sever, in our conception, everything of imperfection, and ascribe everything of real perfection."*

What has been advanced is not intended to banish the anthropomorphic figure of speech, but rather to prevent its being mistaken for literal statement. In the warmth of our emotion, and the play of imagination, it may be used inno-

* John Howe, *Presciency*, p. 122, and *Redeemer's Tears*, p. 446; see Ewald, *Old and New Test. Theology*, pp. 43, 55, 60, 194.

cently, and even with advantage, provided it be in such manner as does not insist on fastening human imperfection on God. Thus we may speak of His Spirit as grieved, or quenched ; of His submitting to our lowliness ; of His being withstood and thwarted by our obstinacy ; of His mourning over our sinful folly ; pleading and beseeching us to yield Him our friendship, anxious for our welfare, and making common cause with us in our wrestlings with infernal powers.*

* Prof. Dowden, referring to Baxter's *Saints' Rest* as typical of Puritanism, asks, "Are we then to think heaven to be made of gold and pearl? Or picture Christ 'as the papists do,' in such a shape? Or believe that departed saints and angels do indeed eat and drink? Or hold that God actually is moved by human passions? Not so. We are to accept such notions as aids to our infirmity, but they cease to be aids when we take them for a literal presentation of the facts; the condescending language of the spirit is so designed that we may 'raise suppositions from our bodily senses,' and so elevate our affections towards things invisible."—*Contemporary Review*, July 1899.

IX

REPLIES

THE present age has shown some unmistakable signs of a tendency to revive belief in the passibility of God, which the ancient Church condemned as contrary to Scripture, and as the outcome of anti-Trinitarian Christology. For these signs it will be sufficient to refer to the following instances:—

Words by the Wayside, by Dr. George Matheson; discourses rich in Christian thought and feeling, couched in poetic prose. We read of “compassion for the divine cross,” p. 88. “Someone has defined religion to be ‘pity for God.’ It is a bold definition; but there is a side on which it is true.” This “divine cross is the divine solitude”; illustrated by the aloofness of a king from his subjects. “The divine pain rose out of the divine greatness.” “‘God is sufficient unto Himself.’ He is not, or His name would not be love,” because love wants an

object.* But one of Dr. Matheson's illustrations confirms our contention that pain is but a secondary and non-essential element of loving sympathy. "Nor dare I say that my love declines because my *emotion* grows dim. Is it not a truth of life that active benevolence increases as our passive sentiment subsides? Yon surgeon who paces the ward with iron step, and surveys the wounds with unquivering eye, was once a youth fainting in pity at the sight of blood. Is he less pitiful now because he is more helpful?" (p. 32).†

"The Misunderstood God," by Rev. Frederick Platt, M.A., B.D., *Wes. Meth. Magazine*, Feb. 1899, teaches: "We may venture to say God does suffer." "There is pain in Him who is passionless, sorrow in the fount of ineffable bliss" (!) "The sorrow of the Most High." "There is pain in God." "His pain is unrequited love." "Someone has defined religion as 'pity for God.'" This "quivers with the pathos of truth." "It is pity for God, 'for the Great Misunderstood,' who is waiting to 'see of the travail of His soul, and to be satisfied.'" Add to "pity for God," "recognition of the mis-

* It has often been pointed out that the Trinity shows Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were eternally objects of love to each other. Hence creation was not necessary in order to provide divine love with an object.

† See p. 106 *supra*.

understood God." "‘Godly sorrow’ — sorrow for God, not for self." The article seems to confound the suffering of Christ in His human nature while on earth with the idea of suffering in the divine. The same doctrine is prominent in Mr. Kernahan’s highly imaginative booklet, *God and the Ant.*

The Divine Mysteries, by Rev. J. Baldwin Brown. This work of much mental vigour, and valuable teaching, includes a chapter on "The Pressure of the Burden of God," which speaks of God, at the entrance of sin and misery, as taking a "sorrowful part"; of His "sorrow" and "anguish" and "struggle"; of His "fellowship with the sinning suffering race."

Depth and Power of the Christian Faith, by Rev. Arthur Hoyle; in other respects a charming, useful book, seeks for a solution of the existence of pain in the greater suffering of God. "I think," we are told, "we may say that God does bear it all," "all the pain there is in the world." "No throb of this world’s pain but ends in His heart. When men rail against God for this world’s woe, they rail against the greatest sufferer."

"But is God silent?" by Richard Heath (*Contemporary Review*, Sept. 1899): a reply to Dr. R. Anderson on "The Silence of God," closes

with a vehement assertion of God's passibility. The article does not sufficiently distinguish between impassibility and indifference. The writer thinks the idea of a suffering God "answers all the doubts that arise at the sight of human suffering," as if to multiply the evil were to get rid of it, or to justify it. I venture to think all these writers have advanced in favour of their doctrine has been answered by anticipation in the foregoing pages. But two living divines of marked ability and influence have so distinctly surrendered to the same doctrine that some particular notice of their views seems to be needful, namely, Dr. A. Fairbairn in *Christ in Modern Theology*, and Dr. George Adam Smith in his *Exposition of Isaiah*.

1. Dr. Fairbairn (pp. 483-486) proclaims suffering in the divine nature as an indispensable truth. He tells us "theology has no falsier idea than that of the impassibility of God." God's hatred of sin was "the sorrow in the heart of His happiness." If so, He may well be an object of man's pity; from the very thought of which one's most reverent feeling recoils, as from a proposal to degrade His infinite majesty. It is remarkable that while some of the ancients reluctantly admitted Patripassianism as the logical effect of their anti-Trinitarian Christ-

ology, Dr. Fairbairn, under no such demand of logical consistency, prefers Patripassianism for its own sake as a precious theological doctrine. "There is a sense," he says, "in which the Patripassian theory is right. The Father did suffer, though it was not as the Son that He suffered, but in modes distinct and different." The following appear to be his principal arguments:—

(1) If God were impassible, He could not feel the evil of sin, or the misery of man. But if it were so, what detriment would that be to Him? or what to sinful man? If sorrow and pain are imperfections, He is better without them, and without the capacity for feeling them. Nay, because He is absolutely perfect, He cannot be their subject. Nevertheless, He knows infallibly everything about them better than do they who are subject to them; just as, though incapable of sinning, He understands all about sin far better than does the sinner. Sin is not less the object of His abhorrence indignation and punitive justice because He feels no pain over it. In a perfect moral being, hatred of sin is not necessarily sorrow or pain, though this may be forgotten by us in whom they are so often combined.

If the strongest reprobation and antagonism

to sin may be called "feeling," God does feel the evil of sin, but not the pain. Nor is He less concerned to rescue man from his misery because that misery is not "sorrow in the heart of His happiness." It is said, "This sense of man's evil and misery (in the heart of God) became the impulse to speak and help." Would He be less disposed to speak and help apart from His suffering pain and sorrow? Is His disposition to help, like ours, dependent on the impulse given by pain? Were He in that respect like us, an acute sense of misery might be necessary to arouse Him to benevolent action. As it is, all such incitements are as foreign to Him as they are needless to His beneficent deeds. That His knowledge implies His subjection to sorrow or pain, and that He feels in Himself the misery of the sinner, are by no means axiomatic principles; they are disputable propositions requiring, before adoption, to be themselves proved true. And this must be kept in mind in estimating Dr. Fairbairn's position.

(2) Again, it is argued that God is capable of sacrifice and surrender, and therefore of suffering. "To be passible is to be capable of sacrifice; and in the presence of sin, the capability could not but become the reality." It would have served Dr. Fairbairn's purpose much better, if he could

have asserted the converse, that to be capable of sacrifice is to be passible. But that would not be true. Yet he seems to assume that God could not make a sacrifice or surrender unless He were passible, which is more than doubtful. The impassible could and did assume a passible nature, in order that in it the same one person—God-man—might be offered in sacrifice. He was “made a little lower than the angels . . . that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” “Since, then, the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. ii.). “A body hast Thou prepared me”; “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. x.). We have no Scripture warrant or *dictum* of reason for asserting that the surrender of the Son by the Father implied suffering in the Father, when He “delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. viii. 32). Moses delivered the customs (Acts vi. 14). Paul delivered the traditions to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. xi. 2), and the faith was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), so far as we

know, without suffering therein. And if the Father suffered in surrendering His Son, it must be proved by better evidence than the use of the word "delivered" (*παράδιδωμι*). The mere fact of surrender or delivery is no proof of suffering in the agent. The Father surrendered the Son to undergo the humiliation which the incarnation made possible. Thus was He found in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, suffering the just for the unjust. But no mention is made of suffering in the Father. He gave His Son; but we have no reason to think He did it with pain, or that it represented "the sacrifice and passion of the whole Godhead," except as the Godhead was identified with, though distinct from, the passible nature and the passion of Christ.

(3) Dr. Fairbairn says: "The very truth that came by Jesus Christ may be said to be summed up in the passibility of God." Where is the proof of this sweeping assertion? Not in His words. We have no intimation that He came to teach it; still less that it was "the very truth" He had especially to communicate. He was the revelation of the Father; and tells us much of the Father's holiness and loving-kindness, of His gracious thought and provision for lost man, of His complacency in all who are true

to Him; but the great Revealer never tells us the Father or the Godhead, as such, was in suffering, or capable of it. The Word made flesh, "full of grace and truth," reflected the character of God, teaching that God sought to recover men from death to eternal life, and that Father and Son are co-equal, and to be equally honoured; but never that God was subject to, or capable of pain or sorrow (John i., ii., iii., v., vii., and x., etc.). He speaks of the "Holy Father," the "Righteous Father," of His dominion over heaven and earth, to which nothing is impossible; but never of a suffering God. He shows how, in His own humanity, the Son of God could endure untold agony; but never hints that it could be experienced in His divine nature. If that were "the very truth" which He came to make known, it is passing strange that in all His utterances He should maintain silence upon it.

Just as little was "the passibility of God" revealed by the works of Christ in the scheme of redemption. It may be read into the scheme by those with whom it is a presupposition; but it is in no way necessary to the completeness, harmony, or efficiency of the redeeming work. Good reason appears why the impassible Son should assume a passible nature in order to be

the atoning substitute of a passible and guilty race. But it does not appear how suffering in the divine nature of Father or Son, had it been possible, was necessary or proper to the success of the scheme, or could have enhanced its value.

It is just because suffering in the divine would have "impoverished the Godhead," and so made Him inferior to His present greatness, that we are unable to think Him passible. And this agrees with the absence of scriptural indications of His passibility, except in such terms and connections as plainly show that the figure of speech called anthropopathy is intended. Such "impoverishment" in Him would be no enrichment of man. It could have no tendency to render His redeeming work more effectual.

Dr. Fairbairn says: "In Him there was nothing akin to evil." Precisely! And as pain is a natural, non-moral evil, it could have no place in Him. Equally accurate is Dr. Fairbairn when he says, "The Sinless bears as His distinguished name 'The Man of Sorrows.'" But that very epithet points to His humanity as the seat of suffering. "Thou hast made His *soul* an offering for sin," like kindred statements, fixes attention on His human suffering.

(4) "The biblical doctrine," we are told, is this, "The humiliation of the Son involved the

visible passion and death, but the surrender by the Father involved the sorrow that was the invisible sacrifice" in the Godhead. And this "biblical doctrine" is supposed to be found in John iii. 16, Rom. viii. 32, 1 John iv. 10. This surrender of the Son by the Father, it is said, "was the measure alike of His love to man and the suffering He (the Father) endured to save." But really how can this "doctrine" be extracted from these texts? He gave His Son because He "so loved the world," not because He was under the impulse of suffering. "He first loved us," and from that motive "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We know that involved unfathomable anguish and shame in the human nature of the Son, which was sustained by the divine. But no mention is made of propitiatory pain in Father or Son, as God. In not withholding His Son, but delivering Him up, the Father is seen actuated by love without any indication of the impulse which comes of suffering.

Considering that all these passages aim at revealing love as the motive power of the atoning gift or surrender, and make no mention of suffering in the Father as the motive, we are obliged to think Dr. Fairbairn's assertion unwarranted. Had the "surrender by the Father involved the sorrow" that was in Him, it is im-

probable that all these texts would have been silent about the sorrow, while accentuating love as the motive. And how much more fitted is divine love than divine pain, not only to prompt the great benefaction, but to win our trustful, loving allegiance in return: seeing the pain could have no moral quality, while love is pre-eminently moral. The agony suffered by Christ in His human nature and predicable of His divine-human person, delivering us from the curse of sin, melts us into shame and contrition for sin, and into humble gratitude; but that is because it was borne freely out of His deep love for us. And the same love was in the Father in giving His Son; and in no wise inferior because in His person there was no passible nature in which to suffer our curse.

In no degree does this view weaken the force of the apostle's inference that, having bestowed the greater, He will not withhold the less. Assurance of all needful help is inferred, not from any suffering in the Father, but from His love. If He has loved us enough to surrender His own Son for us, how much more will He freely give us all we need. The great gift is proof, not of pain, but of love in the donor.

It may be admitted that, as man was first created in the likeness of God, there remain

affinities between the two, which afforded in some sense a reason, and a natural basis for the redeeming work. But we have no right to assume that God was like man in passibility, either before or after the fall; as we cannot assume that God was like man in peccability, or dependence, or limitation. That, again, would resolve God into a kind of magnified man.

We may, therefore, rest assured that the impassibility of God, so far from being a great falsehood in theology, is a clear and precious truth, the loss of which would seriously impoverish Christianity. Among other truths it plays a corrective and harmonising part. It is a safeguard against lapse into errors such as hopelessly entangled some ancient professors of the Christian religion. Though, like a foundation stone, its place may be below the surface, its removal would be a grave peril to Christian theology.

2. Dr. George Adam Smith (Isa. xlii. 13, 14, and lxiii. 1-6; Hos. xi. 9) has devoted eleven pages of his admirable exposition of the Book of Isaiah to a chapter on "The Passion of God." "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man; He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war. Yea, He shall shout aloud; He shall do mightily against His enemies. I have long time holden my peace: I have been still, and refrained my-

self; now will I cry out like a travailing woman; I will gasp and pant together. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers, islands; and will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; in paths that they know not will I lead them: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things will I do, and I will not forsake them. They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed that trust in graven images, that say unto molten images, Ye are our gods."

Chiefly on these words, along with Isaiah lxiii. 1-6, Dr. Smith bases the doctrine of God's passibility. "Remember," writes Dr. Smith, "it is God who speaks these words of Himself, and then think of what they mean of unshareable thought and pain, of solitary yearning and effort" (p. 134). "The suffering of men is upon Him." "He puts Himself on the sympathy and strain of that work." "God puts . . . on its passion and travail." In this chapter, as in the sixty-third, "the Almighty is clothed with human passion and agony. He is described as loving, hating, showing zeal or jealousy, fear, repentance, and scorn. He bides His time, suddenly awakes to effort, and makes that effort in weakness, pain,

and struggle." The Scriptures, "after the most human manner, clothe the Deity in the travail and passion of flesh." "As far as human language is adequate for such a task, they (prophets) picture God's love for men as costing Him so much. He painfully pleads for His people's loyalty; He travails in pain for their new birth and growth in holiness; in all their affliction He is afflicted." God makes their sin, "not only the object of His hate, but the anguish and the effort of His love . . . in sympathy and in travail, the Deity, though omnipotent, is no whit behind the man" (Jeremiah).

One might, perhaps, take all this to be, not the expositor's own belief, but his putting of the prophet's belief; or possibly Dr. Smith's representation of the anthropomorphism by which God is figuratively described, involving a vague prophecy of the agony and struggles of God incarnate. But other expressions of the commentator seem to deny us that relief, and to endorse the idea of real passibility, *e.g.* "What are these (pity, compassion, sympathy) but self-imposed weakness and pain?" "God . . . before the incarnation was afflicted in all His people's affliction" (p. 142). A few observations here, not against these prophetic descriptions of God rightly understood, but against the interpretation

which makes them teach God's passibility, may not be out of place.

Evangelical expositors mostly take Isaiah xlii. 1-7 as Messianic. The servant of Jehovah probably refers to both Israel and the divine-human Christ, both being intermediaries bearing witness for God, and acting and suffering in His cause (cf. Matt. xii. 17-21; Luke ii. 32; John iii. 34; Acts xiii. 47).^{*} Much, therefore, that is said of suffering on the part of God had its fulfilment in the incarnate Son, who in His passible nature was capable of agonising passion. But, as Dr. Smith points out, that cannot explain all.

The only satisfactory explanation is to be found in the anthropomorphic style in which the blessed God is figuratively, and with much dramatic force, represented as if He were a man. No marvel, if we recollect how far the Old Testament prophets went in that direction, how

^{*} "The idea of Servant of Jehovah, to speak figuratively, is a pyramid. The lowermost basis is the whole of Israel; the middle section Israel, not merely after the flesh, but after the spirit; the summit is the person of the Mediator of salvation, arising out of Israel" (Delitzsch). "The idea 'Servant of Yahweh' was united from the first in God's purpose with the people of Israel (cf. Exod. iv. 23), but it outgrew this national limit, as the idea 'Son of God' likewise at first was attributed to the people, but also became a separate person and was definitely assigned to the Messiah, *i.e.* the Lord's anointed (Ps. 2, etc.)" (Orelli).

much they wrote or spoke with the licence of poetry, and how long their day preceded the completion of the supernatural revelation contained in the Bible. This explanation leaves intact the perfect blessedness of the Holy One. From the poverty of human language to express the ineffable, and from the natural tendency of teachers to represent the sublime and transcendent by similitudes drawn from the common and familiar, it might have been expected, had the question arisen previously, that God would be described as if He had the nature character and conditions, and even imperfections, of man; and yet not so that careful discrimination should be unable to distinguish the highly figurative character of the accounts.

That much of what is ascribed to God in the passages under notice is anthropomorphic, exceedingly figurative, and rhetorical, is beyond dispute. Delitzsch aptly characterises the passage in Isaiah lxiii. as a "highly poetic piece," with "an evident endeavour after emblematic prophecy." And Dr. Smith remarks that "Semites had a horror of painting the Deity. But when God had to be imagined or described, they chose the form of a man, and attributed to Him human features, chiefly they thought of His face." Looking at these passages and their contexts, we find that

God pursues His enemies with bow and sword, by a way He had not gone with His feet. At His doings the ends of the earth trembled. He had a right hand of righteousness, and a "hand" that did wonders (Isa. xli.). It is said, "He shall go forth as a mighty man; He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war. He shall cry, yea, He shall shout aloud; He shall do mightily against His enemies" (Isa. xlii. 13). Unquestionably He is contemplated in the aspect of a man; yet quite as certainly the language is extremely figurative, and prepares us for more of the same kind in what follows. "I have long time holden my peace: I have been still, and refrained myself; now will I cry out like a travailing woman; I will gasp and pant together" (Isa. xlii. 14, 15). Can we suppose He literally fought with Himself, forcing silence on Himself against the pent-up pressure of a mighty internal impulse? or that He really and actually gasped and panted, and cried out like a woman in travail? Even those who think they see "the passion of God" in the language, must admit much of it is highly figurative, and not literal. But if the usual *signs* of a woman in travail when applied to Jehovah are figurative anthropomorphism, why not so also the passion which is thereby signified? There is no more

necessity to attribute the painful passion to "the blessed God" than the outward demonstrations of such passion. As the panting, gasping, and outcry are allowed to be but figurative representations of His action, seeing there are insuperable objections to their being taken literally; for equally good reasons we may take the suggestion of pain to be a figurative way of indicating His antagonism and concern, in relationships which, with men, are actually associated with tumultuous agitation and pain, but are taken figuratively when applied to God. They are associated with His state and attitude because He is described as if He were a man. When the anthropomorphic style is dropped, the human characteristics, temporarily borrowed for the occasion, also fall away as a vesture.

Again, will anyone to-day, except such as the Mormonites, so far imitate the ancient Audians as to put any but a highly figurative meaning on the statement that, as to Israel, God "poured upon him the fury of His anger, and the strength of battle; and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart" (Isa. xlii. 25).

Nothing but the anthropomorphic figure of speech will explain God's marching in the greatness of His strength from Bozrah, in garments

red with the blood of the people, treading them in His anger, and trampling them in His fury, and making them drunk with the same (Isa. lxiii. 1-6). In the same anthropomorphic manner, it is added, "So He was their Saviour. In all their affliction, He was afflicted," or "affliction was to Him";* not necessarily and actually in Him, but reflexly extending towards Him, and dealt with by Him, *i.e.* their affliction was opposed to and by Him; unless we adopt the reading preferred by some critics, "In all their affliction he was not (לֹא) their adversary."† But the latter reading, whether the best or not,

* לֹא to Him=towards, against, belonging to, related to Him.

† "In all their adversity, He was no adversary,' quite the reverse; His heaviest chastisements were sent with the view of frustrating the designs of their worst enemies." *Pro* this rendering it is said, "(a) It preserves the continuity of the subject of ver. 8, 'He became to them (להם) a Saviour. In all their adversity He was *no adversary*; but the Angel of His presence *saved them*.' This meets the objection of Knob. and Del., who urge the absence of להם after צַר. (b) In Ex. xxiii. 20-23, it is promised that in case of Israel's obedience, the Lord, acting by His Angel, will be an adversary (וְיָצִיר) to their adversaries. (c) In Num. x. 9 we have the noun צַר and the verb נִישַׁע in antithesis. (d) In Lam. ii. 4 we read, 'He (the Lord) stood with His right hand as an adversary,' בְּצַד, as though He had identified Himself with the adversaries, into whose hands *helpless* Jerusalem fell (i. 7, i. 5-10, and iv. 12)." Lam. refers to Isaiah, *e.g.* iii. 22-32; *Speaker's Commentary*, *in loco*.

is unnecessary to our purpose of vindicating the impassibility of God. Taking the rendering of our English Bible, it is enough if we bear in mind that ver. 9, in keeping with the language preceding and following (ver. 15), is manifestly poetic and figurative teaching that God met their affliction as if it had acted through them against Himself, but not that it impaired His infinite blessedness.

On the same principle, it is written they "grieved His Spirit" (Isa. lxiii. 10), meaning that His relation to them, in consequence of their conduct, was such as in human experience is identified with grief. Either it is so, or there is no escape from positive contradiction between different statements of Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit was ill-requited; He received ingratitude in return for loving-kindness. His just claims and gracious influences were disregarded. Evil was returned for good, resulting in loss of His merciful offers of strength and gladness—treatment which, towards man, would produce painful disappointment in the benefactor, that is, grief and vexation, which names are therefore given to the effect on the attitude and action of the divine Spirit, in order to render the description of the wrong the more vivid and effective. The Spirit is wrongfully and despite-

fully resisted. Consequently His grace is forfeited. And when this treatment is carried to the extreme point, the Spirit is said to be "quenched." As God is said to repent when He takes on, not the self-accusation and regret for past conduct which repentance implies in man, but a change of disposition and action towards another, which is also implied in man's repentance, so He is said to be grieved or vexed when He comes into relations which in man are accompanied with grief or vexation. The language is figurative and anthropomorphic to a high degree, but need not be misunderstood.

When Dr. Smith asserts that "He is described as loving, hating, showing zeal or jealousy, fear, repentance, and scorn"; and "suddenly awakes to effort, and makes that effort in weakness, pain, and struggle, so extreme that He likens Himself, not only to a solitary man in the ardour of battle, but to a woman in her unshareable hour of travail"; he admits that the prophets "do not hesitate to be anthropomorphic—imparting to Deity the passions of men" (p. 137). Surely we are not to exempt from this reasonable explanation the statement that God was afflicted in the affliction of His people? In the midst of statements undeniably anthropomorphic and incapable of literal interpretation, it appears

unreasonable to insist on making an exception of one passage by forcing a literal sense on the word "afflicted"; the more so as such exegesis would involve our acceptance of a God laden with misery, and consequently an object of commiseration to His creatures.

Similarly, when God, through the prophet Hosea, declares, "Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together" (Hos. xi. 9), we understand Him to mean that His disposition towards Israel has become such as in man would be associated with acute mental struggle, conflicting emotions and affections in process of being violently reversed; not that He, like man, actually endures the pangs, distress, or strain incident to the transition, as experienced in human nature, but that in Him is the mercy which longs to forgive and restore the rebellious.

This, again, agrees with the highly figurative strain of the context: "I took them on My arms." "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws" (Hos. xi. 3, 4). "I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the Lord, who shall roar like a lion" (Hos. xi. 9, 10). That the words are intended to represent, not passionate agitation in the divine

mind, but His attitude of mercy—a change from the relation of judicial opposition to one of readiness to forgive, and to receive back to His complacency protection and prospering grace, could scarcely have been more manifest if the expressions had been accompanied by a categorical statement to that effect. The keen suffering of God in the scene is but a dramatic feature calculated to strike the imagination and rouse the affections of the reader, and still more of the people originally addressed.

It appears to be assumed that absence of pain from the nature of God would make Him in that matter inferior to men, in whom love and pain are combined. We are told by Dr. Smith (p. 139), “The highest moral ideal is not, and never can be, the righteousness that is regnant, but that which is militant and agonising.” This implies that natural evil is necessary to the highest moral good; that had there never been suffering, God, however holy in Himself, and however great the holiness and blessedness of His created universe, could not have been as great or good as He now is; that conflict and agony on the side of righteousness, enhance His moral excellence. Then why should He be an object of pity? Why should conflict and agony be deprecated, and, as far as possible, avoided, or

done away, if it affords even God Himself an opportunity of goodness otherwise impossible? Will God continue "militant and agonising" in the endless future, or will His highest state of goodness along with His conflict and agony become only a thing of the past? If the warfare and agony shall cease at some future period, and He shall ever continue as good and great, as wise, benevolent, and righteous, as He was during the struggle, does it not show that His moral excellence was not in the agony, but in the moral character which (*ex hypothesi*) made Him willing to endure it, and that He might have been equally good and great in Himself, if the occasion for enduring it had never arisen?

Dr. Smith continues: "Had Jehovah been nothing but the righteous Judge of all the earth, then His witnesses and martyrs, and His prophets who took to themselves the conscience and reproach of their people's sins, would have been as much more admirable than Himself, as the soldier who serves his country on the battle-field, or lays down his life for his people, is more deserving of their gratitude, and more certain of their devotion, than the king who equips him, sends him forth, and himself stays at home" (pp. 139, 140).

On the question before us, this is not a fair

comparison. It compares a man full of righteousness, generosity, and sympathy with a God having only the righteousness ; whereas it should be with a God as perfect in love as in justice, and infinitely richer than the man in compassion and readiness to help the needy. It can be no detraction from His excellence that His goodness is all happy, and not in the least degree painful. Let the case be fully put, and unless agony *in se* be esteemed an admirable moral quality, we can have no hesitation in denying the inferiority of God to the man, be he martyr, witness, or prophet. From whom but God does the man hold his being, his strength, his courage, his skill, his opportunity ? To whom but God does he owe all his devotion and service ? As a sinner, on whose tender mercy does he depend but God's for any good he can possess ? In all his most noble doings or sufferings, whose righteousness and goodness but God's does he imitate ? How then is he better than God ? Is he more virtuous because in him and not in God, justice, faithfulness, truth, patience, and mercy are associated with suffering ? In these respects the relation of the king to the soldier is no parallel to that of God to His servant. The illustration, therefore, is misleading. On the supposition that, in the events of the exodus, God

suffered no pain, was He for that reason less great, or good, or admirable, or less "deserving" of "gratitude," than Moses who suffered so much?

The king may be more kind and useful to his people, and more willing to hazard his life in their behalf, than the soldier, though, from the duties of his position, unable to do so; so God may be more loving and ready to help than the prophet or martyr, though, from His nature as God, incapable of undergoing pain. He pities, relieves, and delivers according to His own nature and character, not according to ours; that is, in ways that are possible and congruous to His attributes, not to ours. His loving-kindness would be none the more true, deep, powerful, or beneficent to man than it now is, were it full of pain instead of being devoid of it. His "patience, sympathy, and love" are not a whit less real, excellent, or effective, because not mingled with suffering. His painless love to man is co-ordinate with righteousness, and to the apprehension of a healthy moral sense, is so exquisitely beautiful and precious, that to add an ingredient of unhappiness could not improve it. If "weakness," "strain," "agony" could be added, they might lower Him to be an object of pity, but could not make Him more admirable to a pure mind, or a more worthy object of worship.

If suffering invests the martyr with qualities which are fitted to evoke gratitude admiration and devotion, and which are wanting in a non-suffering God, and if, for that reason, the conclusion must be drawn that God actually suffers with the martyr, the argument cannot stop there; it would apply with equal force to death. If special magnanimity is displayed by the martyr's death such as is wanting in a God not dying for the cause, why should God not die with His martyr? Probably the reply would be that His death was not necessary, desirable, or possible, and that it could not enhance His superiority to the martyr in respect of any moral excellence. But that conclusive answer is also ours in defence of God's freedom from the martyr's pain. Such pain would be needless and impossible, nor could it add aught to His moral perfection. If this be not a complete answer to the argument intended in Dr. Smith's illustration of a suffering servant of God, it is worthless as a reply to the suggestion that God ought to die. But, indeed, the argument couched in the illustration is utterly unsound in both applications. It rests on the erroneous assumption that the glory of the martyr dying at the stake, or the soldier dying on the battlefield, is in his sufferings; whereas it is rather in the

prevailing power of certain great moral principles, in the possession or display of which the foremost moral hero will bear no comparison with the Holy One.

We are referred to the text, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Then are we to understand, as the above comparisons would imply, that in order to make His love parallel to man's, or of the highest quality, God, as God, should lay down His life? We have just seen that the advocates of divine passibility are obliged to plead justly that God does not die, because it is needless and impossible, and that all the death that was necessary on His part as Redeemer was accomplished in "the flesh" of the incarnate Word. The same defence is equally conclusive with regard to the absence of all suffering from the divine nature. The difference is that our opponents apply it in explanation of His not dying; while we apply it also in defence of His not suffering. We affirm that because it was impossible, as well as undesirable, that God, as God, should suffer or die, He, in the humanity of His eternal Son, assumed for the purpose a nature in which He suffered and died; *thus* making the sinful condition of His people "the anguish and the effort of His love." But how

does it follow that His love or moral character is inferior to that of the prophet or the martyr? Surely neither prophet nor martyr ever thought the absence of suffering and death a defect or imperfection in God our Saviour.

Dr. Smith speaks of "the pain that is thus inseparable from love." But there must have been painless, perfect love from eternity between the persons of the ever-blessed Trinity; and there must have been similar love between the Creator and His personal creatures before sin and pain existed; as there will be between Him and His glorified saints and angels in the eternal future.

X

PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE

THE practical bearing of our question is momentous. It is not a far cry from the passibility of God to an unsound Christology and anti-Trinitarian heresy. Apollinarianism brought in a suffering God by denying a proper human spirit to Christ, leaving only the divine nature to bear the suffering. As Apollinaris reasoned from the absence of a passible soul to the presence of a passible God, it may be quite as easy for some in these days to infer the needlessness of a human soul from the idea of a seat of suffering in the Deity. Each suggests the other. The Sabellians resolved the Godhead into One person, of three aspects or phases; thus providing the premises from which to infer that the sufferings were in the Deity. It is about equally reasonable to argue from a suffering Deity to an unreal humanity in Christ.

It will suit the advocates of Pantheism to

hear that Christian teachers make their God the greatest of all sufferers, as it will tend to do away with the essential, transcendent distinction between God and nature. The method of the Audians literally construing manifestly figurative ascriptions to God of "body, parts, and passions," modern passibilists would probably repudiate; but their principles of interpretation, consistently carried out, might lead them far in that direction.

The doctrine we are opposing affects the nature of the atonement. If it be true, the act of propitiation wrung the heart of Deity, and made Him the victim of wicked cruelty, and of judicial penalty—subjected the infinite Being and supreme Ruler of the universe to an abject humiliation which justice did not demand from Him, which may well induce some to reject the atonement, rather than accept it with such implications. On the other hand, if He be impassible, the undiminished strength and majesty of the Godhead are seen sustaining the agony and shameful death which centred in the Son of Man, enriching them with a value and efficacy sufficient to redeem a lost world.

The question profoundly affects the greatness of the God we worship. This modern attempt to revive Patripassianism invites us to exchange our exhilarating thought of God as the centre

and source of unsullied happiness, delighting to make His creatures perfectly happy, for an idea of God as the most miserable object of our pity. If He be subject to pain and anguish corresponding to the measure of all human suffering, and is thus the greatest and most pitiable sufferer in existence, our adoring delight in Him is liable to serious check by the thought of His pitiable state. For if His sympathetic pity for us involves His suffering on our account, our pity for Him as the greatest of all sufferers must involve our deep suffering on His account—a state of things which cannot but disturb and depress our feelings as we approach Him for worship and communion, and thus alloy what should be our purest bliss on earth or in heaven. Our exultation in His perfect blessedness, His all-sufficiency, and illimitable transcendence above all evil, is dissipated. Our adoring admiration, inspired by the vision of His unsullied glory, as winsome and enrapturing as it is solemnising, is damped by an element of commiseration; and the shadow deepens as we attain nearer views of His actual state. Imagine a pure spirit rapt with delight in God, approaching the ineffable One enthroned above all creation, to render Him its unreserved homage of love, and thanks, and praise, and to bathe in

the boundless sea of His glory, discovering that His blessedness is but partial! How the discovery must chill its rapture into disappointment, and its jubilant ascriptions of "blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might" into pitying sadness,—if not a bitter wail. How much greater the disappointment in the better knowledge and closer intimacy of the celestial fellowship. And then how mixed must be the final state of rewards to which the Saviour invites us, and to which we aspire as the consummation of our well-being.

Men talk with sentimental vehemence on the assumption apparently that to attribute pitiable suffering to God is to purify and exalt our conception of His greatness; not always without a reproachful or impatient tone towards those who find it impossible to agree with them, as if denial of God's passibility sprang from a cold phlegmatic temperament, an unsympathetic heart, or lack of healthy emotion, rather than from love of truth, and honest search for it. Do not they who talk so overweeningly of their own convictions, really debase the conception of the Most High, infusing into it a strain of evil? Passibility could not make Him more mighty to save sinners, more just or more benevolent,

more faithful or more merciful, more watchful over our interests, or more willing and able to guide and guard us through all the trials of life, to sustain us under its burdens, to deliver us from its ills and perils, and bring us to life everlasting. It could not make our Heavenly Father more lovable, valuable, or precious to us, as our infallible Counsellor, the Rock of our confidence and hope, our companion, and the object of our faith and love and worship.

Our trust for salvation loves to repose in an Almighty Saviour who is in no pitiable plight, and needs no deliverance for Himself. To tell us we are relying for rescue on one who is Himself the subject of our evil, is to enfeeble our hopes, and lower our estimate of His well-being. To believe Him the subject of pitiable grief and pain would surely damage our appreciation of His excellence, and foul the springs of our delight in Him. It would imply that His blessedness was, in part at least, dependent upon the will and conduct of His creatures, inasmuch as their voluntary sin and its consequent misery must involve Him in suffering, and so detract from His happiness. For to create them morally free was to endow them with absolute power to introduce sin and suffering; which (*ex hypothesi*) could not but affect Him painfully.

Such lowering of His greatness would be retrograde for us as well as for Him; seeing our enjoyment of Him depends on our conviction of His absolute perfection. As the God of Pantheism, Deism, or Mohammedanism results in a religion diverse from Christianity, so belief in a passible God must result in a religion different from that which Christian people have hitherto deduced from the conviction that perfect happiness is as necessary to God as perfect power, knowledge, justice, and benevolence.

The glory of God and the highest well-being of His people alike require that every conceivable excellence be complete in Him: that our approaches to Him in reverent, glad, confiding homage be not marred or disappointed by discovery of natural evil in Him, or of His dependence for happiness or unhappiness on the free will of His creatures; and that the mind of the worshipper may for ever rise to clearer and more expanded visions of His glory, flawless and illimitable. The living God, the fountain of all life, must have life without the least drawback of pain or uneasy perturbation. The recipient of pure bliss from Him must have no shadow of doubt concerning His unmixed happiness. As we could not be thoroughly satisfied with a Deity deficient in wisdom or ethical goodness,

neither could we with one deficient in blessedness. For our glorying in Him with all our powers of thought will and affection, as the source and end of our being, the spring of our joy and our all-sufficient God, whom we adore and serve and rejoice to call "Our Father," we are assured He is infinitely blessed as He is infinitely mighty, and perfectly "holy and just and good."

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